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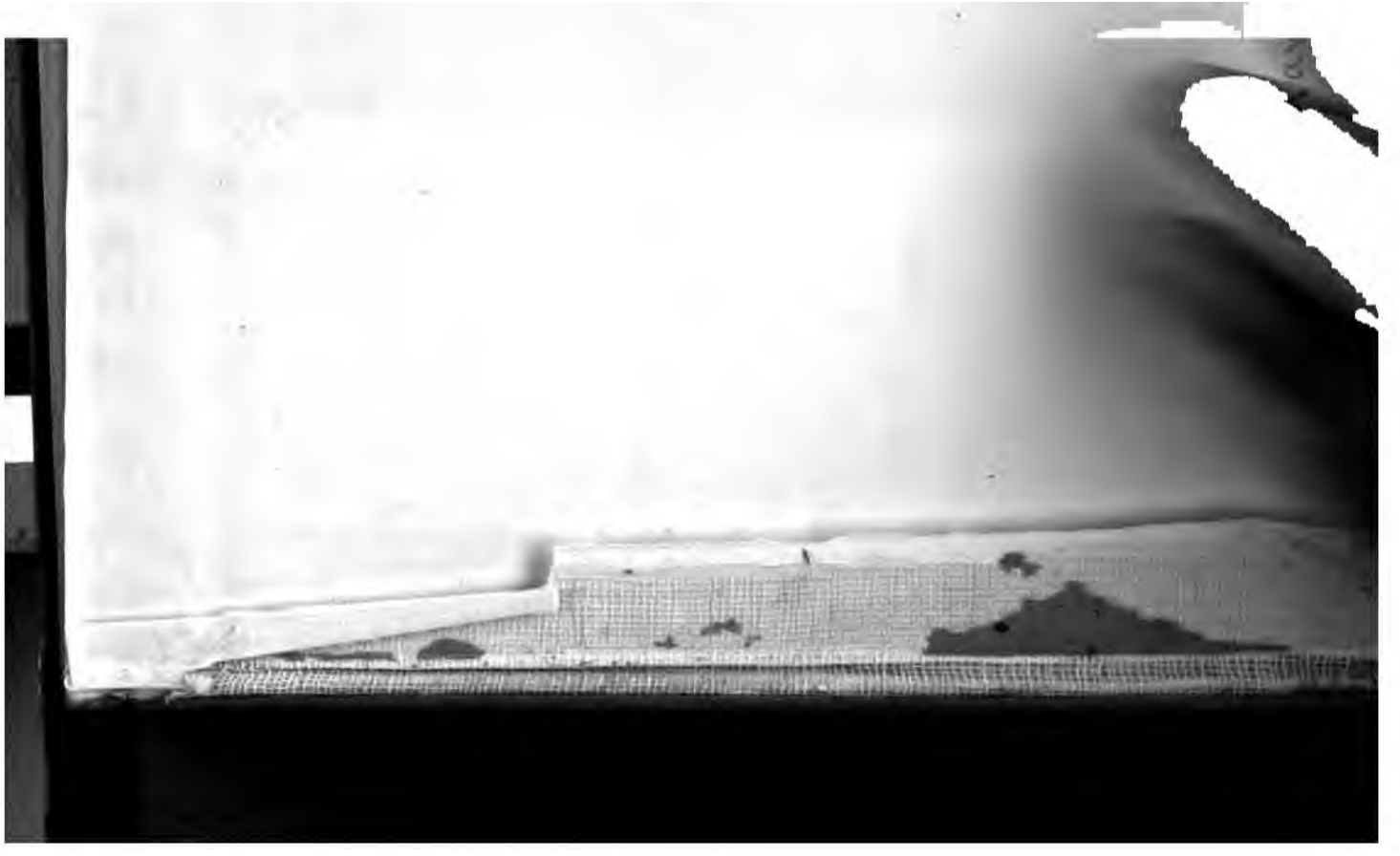
WHOSE NAME IS LEGION

BY

ISABEL C. CLARKE



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WHOSE NAME IS LEGION

BY

ISABEL C. CLARKE

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

BENZIGER BROTHERS

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WHOSE NAME IS LEGION

CHAPTER I

SIR JAMES BETT was sitting alone on a November morning in the big library at East Feddon Hall. He was smoking a cigar and reading the *Times*, which an attentive footman had brought to him half an hour earlier, but it was easy to see that his thoughts were not wholly concentrated on the foreign telegrams upon which his eyes rested. He sat near the window, as the day was gloomy and the light bad, and occasionally he glanced at the typically East Anglian landscape which lay outstretched beyond, under a low gray sky. Sir James would have preferred to sit nearer to the generous fire which burned and leaped with such ruddy, enticing flames under the black carved mantelpiece; but he had abandoned that position on the arrival of the *Times* because he could not see to read there.

When he raised his eyes and looked out of the window he shivered involuntarily. The cold gloom of the scenery did not appeal to him. At East Feddon the river widened out into a small broad, across which a great wherry, with its huge brown sail unfurled, was slowly making its way. Beyond the lake the river could be seen winding tortuously in shining though colorless glimpses through the endless green fields, and here and there in places where it was invisible from the house a sail stood up

sharply, emerging as it were from the meadows, and the impression given was that of a ship miraculously sailing across the flat pasture-land, since no water was apparent. There had just been a shower of rain, and the horizon was pale and blurred as if by cold drifting mists. The garden, which sloped very slightly down to Feddon Broad, looked a little disconsolate with its clumps of sodden chrysanthemums and Michaelmas daisies that made soft blots of rather indefinite color. Two gardeners were busy sweeping up the leaves which had fallen in considerable profusion upon the lawns and terraces during last night's storm.

Sir James Bett was a retired Anglo-Indian official, and he felt the cold and damp of the late autumn in England. The sharp East Anglian climate, with its bitter, scourging winds, was trying to a man who had spent the working years of his life in the tropics. This morning his lean, thin face looked more yellow and hawklike than usual. His eyes, which had that peculiar prominent look so often observable in persons who have sojourned long beneath the fierce Indian sunshine, were dark in hue, and the whites were slightly tinged with yellow. On days such as these he regretted his retirement, and wished himself back in that land which he had once hated as a place of exile and now desired with an overwhelming nostalgia.

His expression, which had never been of the winning and pleasant kind, had now become permanently discontented. When he first came home he had been given an appointment of some importance in which it was believed his very extensive knowledge of India, especially of its southern portion, would be particularly useful. But he had not retained it long, and it was impossible to believe that he had relinquished it of his own will. Gossip

averred that his advice had been followed on some question of great importance, and the results had been so disastrous that Sir James had immediately received the courteous intimation that his retirement would be accepted. But no one knew the exact truth of the affair, and he himself had never been known to allude to it.

As he sat there his hostess, Mrs. Blair, came into the room. She was a widow of some four years' standing and still wore black. She was rather pretty, with brown hair, blue eyes, and a very absent-minded expression. This was partly due to the fact that she was extremely short-sighted.

"So tiresome!" she said, going up to him with a letter in her hand. "Everything was so perfectly arranged. And now I have just had this letter from Rupert saying he is coming home to-morrow for a few days' leave, and is bringing Father Benedict with him. The very last person I wished to have in the house just now! It is a bore — is it not? — when one's house belongs to one's stepson. That sounds Irish, I know, but you understand what I mean."

"It won't matter very much, will it?" said Sir James, knitting his brows, "if we are all very careful to hold our tongues."

He looked meditatively out of the window.

"How long can Scudamore stop?" he asked, drumming his thin yellow fingers on the window-pane.

"Only till Tuesday. He has an important engagement in Paris next week. Rupert is sure to stay till Sunday night, and I don't suppose we shall get rid of Father Benedict before Monday morning."

"And this is Thursday!" said Sir James, laying aside the *Times*. "Is any one else coming?"

"Mrs. Silva, of course," replied Mrs. Blair. "I expect her this afternoon. She will probably motor down with the Professor. The Saltmarshes are to stay till Tuesday, but I can manage them all right. They are delighted at the prospect of meeting Father Benedict. It seems to me that the more a priest tells people how bad they are the better they like it and him. Oh, and Miss Winton is coming. I had no idea that she and Billy Mowbray hadn't met since her engagement. He seemed quite annoyed when I told him that she was coming. He took it very badly, I believe. Still, as they are cousins they were bound to meet sooner or later. My party is all at sixes and sevens this time."

She looked at him quite pathetically.

"And then, on the top of it all — Rupert and Father Benedict!"

Sir James Bett laughed in a dry, mirthless fashion.

"It reminds me of the Happy Families one sees sometimes in menageries. All kinds of ill-assorted and mutually antagonistic animals and birds thrust into the same cage; only waiting really for an opportunity of devouring one another."

"Yes, doesn't it?" she agreed. "I don't mind, though, as long as Father Benedict suspects nothing. He has such terribly penetrating eyes — quite as penetrating in their way as Professor Scudamore's."

"It would be interesting to see if they penetrate each other," said Sir James.

"Oh, I do hope they won't do that!" she cried aghast. "You see, Father Benedict mistrusts me. He regards me as a backslider. He does not think me capable of looking after Rupert and East Feddon. He is always coming here under one pretext or another."

"What an amount of leave these young officers get nowadays," observed Sir James.

"Yes, don't they? But, of course, I'm delighted to have the boy. It just happens to be a little inconvenient this time. You see, he dislikes Professor Scudamore. He really isn't quite polite to him. I've often wondered if he suspects anything."

Sir James watched with apparently deepened attention the activities of the two gardeners.

"How is Marcelle to-day?" he inquired, after a slight pause.

"Oh, she's quite recovered. She will be all right for to-morrow if we can only manage it. Father Benedict, you know, has a habit of staying so late in the chapel — I really think sometimes he stays there all night! — and one is never certain of not meeting him. I have put him as far away as I can — right at the end of the east wing, in that little room next to Rupert's. I shall ask him to use the back staircase when he goes down to the chapel, and I hope that may prevent him from prowling about the hall. It is so tiresome, isn't it, when one has to insure secrecy in this way! It makes one feel so guilty."

Sir James smiled dryly.

"If we belonged to Father Benedict's flock we should be accounted guilty," he said. "And of course it is most important that Rupert shouldn't know anything. He is quite capable of drastic action — supported by the authority of Father Benedict."

"Yes," she admitted. "I should have short shrift. Between the two of them I should soon be turned out of East Feddon. Dear Edmund made the blunder of his life when he appointed that man to be Rupert's guardian."

Rupert was Mrs. Blair's stepson, the sole off-

spring of her husband's first marriage. She had no children of her own, and she had come to East Feddon as a bride when the boy was only seven years old. Since that time she had always had the nominal care of Rupert, and she had been extremely fond of him. He was seventeen years old when his father died suddenly, and in his will he directed that Rupert should be under the guardianship of Father Benedict — except in the case of a certain contingency — till he came of age. Mrs. Blair felt that by doing this her husband had shown a singular want of confidence in her.

The circumstances of the case were these. Both Edmund Blair and his first wife were Catholics, and their child had, of course, been brought up in their faith. Margaret Blair was, however, not a Catholic, and at her husband's death she found herself excluded from the guardianship of Rupert unless she became one during the first year of her widowhood, when she was to share this office with Father Benedict.

Edmund Blair had made this will when Rupert was only twelve, but he had never altered it. It had demonstrated clearly to his widow how keen had been his desire that she should share his own faith. She was extremely attached to her husband, and when he died she seemed, to the few who were permitted to see her, perfectly broken-hearted. She begged Father Benedict to come and stay at East Feddon, and she placed herself under instruction without delay. Now that Edmund was dead she was prepared to give him that which, during his lifetime, he had so earnestly desired.

The priest held back a little. He was a plain, blunt, matter-of-fact man, and he doubted the conversion that is based purely upon emotion. But in the few weeks that followed Margaret Blair gave

him abundant guarantees of her good faith. She studied assiduously; she attended his Mass daily in the little chapel (a pre-Reformation one which Edmund's father had restored and made extremely beautiful), she was to all appearances sincere, devout, and very much in earnest. He dated the change in her from a certain time when she had gone to town for a few days to do some shopping. Upon her return she abruptly told him that she had altered her mind. Without adducing any reason she broke off the instructions, she ceased to attend Mass or even to enter the chapel, and leaving East Feddon she took a flat in town and remained there for three months.

Rupert had then just entered Sandhurst. He had been educated for the Army at one of the larger Catholic colleges. When he next returned home he felt that his stepmother's interest in him had considerably lessened. He had been warned by Father Benedict that she had given up her intention of being received into the Church. He found her less sympathetic than he could ever remember. She never mentioned his father, although he felt that their great mutual loss should have brought them more closely together. The boy had adored his father, and had felt his death very keenly.

Many people imagined that this abrupt change of plans on Margaret's part forecasted an early second marriage. But as months deepened into years and she returned to East Feddon and took up her life again there, this idea gradually faded from the minds of those who were interested in her.

"I don't see," said Sir James, "that with his unfortunately very bigoted views he had any other course open to him."

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Blair with a sigh.

"Still, Father Benedict needn't watch Rupert as a cat watches a mouse."

"You are a suspect, you see," said Sir James. "You put your hand to the plow."

She reddened.

"I did try — for Rupert's sake as well as my own. I should have gone on if I hadn't found a truer light."

There was something odd and enigmatic in Sir James Bett's face as he listened to this speech.

"Yes," he said, "we were only just in time."

CHAPTER II

No one had ever ascertained any precise details as to the birth, antecedents, or even the nationality of the man who was known as Professor Scudamore. Nor, indeed, had it ever been considered essential that such insignificant trifles regarding a man at once so elusive and so renowned should be formally investigated. It was certainly not upon such grounds as these that he owed his welcome to many houses that were known to be inaccessible to persons of far greater claim to distinction than was the Professor. Yet his welcome was always sufficiently warm to demonstrate the fact that his presence was desired, and to insure at least tolerance and civility from such of his fellow-guests who were fastidious enough to wish to know something of a man's antecedents.

He was a mystery even, it must be said, to those who knew him best, and to whom he had disclosed the nature of the work in which he was engaged. But he did not all at once suggest mystery. There was very little about him to excite curiosity beyond

the slight surprise that his presence occasionally afforded, yet even this was quickly accounted for by the fact that in the most exclusive houses there are almost always to be found persons of seeming unimportance who have yet achieved so intimate a footing there as to constitute in itself a tacit assurance of their work and consequence.

Professor Scudamore's appearance was not at all a striking one. Small, slight, and thin, he was fair rather than dark. His hair was very thick and quite gray, and he wore it *à la brosse* — one of the only peculiarities which seemed to hint at a nationality other than British. His spectacles, which he invariably wore, alone drew attention to his eyes, which were wide open, frank, and hard as steel — fearless, vigilant eyes. Most people, seeing him for the first time, believed him to be an eminent scientist, probably of Dutch or Swiss extraction.

It was often a little difficult to account for his presence in country houses given over to the promotion of sport in all its varied forms. He did not shoot; it was quite certain he had never handled a gun or a golf club in his life, and although he spoke of riding in connection with his travels, no one had ever seen him on a horse. He spent most of the daylight hours in the solitude of his own apartments. It was only the initiated who understood why he was there, and a conspiracy of silence enfolded them.

For the Professor was a spiritualist — one of those advanced and fearless investigators into occult phenomena who not only call spirits from the "vasty deep," but are also satisfied that they both hear and respond.

His profession was necessarily conducted *sub rosa*. Those who indulged in spiritualistic practices are aware that two attitudes commonly characterize the

majority of persons, not thus engaged, toward such practices. One is the attitude of scoffing incredulity, and the other, which is less common, is that of horror and disapproval and complete condemnation.

He did not spend a great deal of his time in visiting, for his principal work lay in the fields of research and investigation rather than of mere experiment. He had once belonged to a certain famous Society which exists to investigate phenomena, but he had somewhat quickly terminated his connection with it. Mild ghost stories, naïve accounts of experiments in thought-transference, generally between ladies at a distance (often of a very elementary and domestic character), and the like, had ceased to interest him. A house that was definitely haunted was another matter, and the discovery of a new medium in any part of the globe was always sufficient to make him turn his steps thither as fast as ship or train could take him. In the matter of nerves he was scarcely human, for he had been known to remain night and day quite alone in a haunted house for weeks together, refusing all offers of companionship, and emerging there from without any trace of those evil intelligence with which he had endeavored to come in contact.

This attachment to the unseen and the occult, possibly the demoniacal (for his researches k no limits, and he was quite unscrupulous abov methods of conducting them), had given h peculiarly detached air toward common da jects, even toward the men and women he tered. But where he made his influence fel among those who were absolutely ignorant profession, it never failed to leave an inde pression as of something weird, sinister, plicable. It pleased him on occasion to

were, some suggestion of his own power and to watch its effect upon susceptible persons.

Those, however, who belonged to the band of his adherents and who had been initiated rather shrank from any such disagreeable manifestations of unnatural powers. And owing to his reputedly enormous wealth, to which he must have added annually immense sums, since his fees were exorbitant, it had been hinted of him that he had sold himself to the Prince of Darkness.

His clients, of whom the greater number were women, never wearied of hearing him discourse upon his favorite subject. His dry and cold manner when he was enunciating facts of which the full horror, perhaps, was never properly realized by them, was part of the man's uncanny charm. His flat, even voice, that never betrayed emotion, held them spellbound, giving them delicious thrills. Indeed, the only indication of emotion that he ever displayed was betrayed by his eyes — so bright, so steel-like in their fearless scrutiny behind those never-removed glasses. For he was always perfectly and absolutely controlled. His hands were motionless. When he stood there relating some of his more harmless experiments, he seemed like an icy enigma; and he made his audiences uncomfortably aware that his memory stored yet other experiences which he had never divulged; secrets too ghastly to be revealed in a West End drawing-room; dark, sinister, terrifying stories of corporal struggles with those unseen forces he had summoned deliberately into the exterior world from their courts of outer darkness. . . .

It was not often that he evoked that resentment of his presence which Mrs. Blair had thought to detect in Rupert, and in a lesser and more concealed degree in Father Benedict, the well-known Jesuit

priest. For the Professor was singularly self-effacing, emerging from his own apartments only at such an hour when the initiated were free to command his attention. It was known that in the matters of food and sleep Professor Scudamore was curiously unlike his fellow-mortals. When he dined alone a single dish of vegetables, a little fruit, a slice of bread, and a cup of black coffee constituted his meal. Often it was carried down untouched, as if he had failed to notice the tray.

It was at East Feddon — a large picturesque, red-brick house in Norfolk — that Professor Scudamore first met the young man who was almost universally known as Billy Mowbray. Or perhaps, under the circumstances, it would be more correct to reverse the sentence, and say that it was there, under Mrs. Blair's hospitable roof, that Billy first met Professor Scudamore.

Billy was not one of the initiated. He was only a spoilt child of fortune, who had somehow received two substantial legacies of money and property from persons only distantly related to him. He was twenty-six years old, and had been for a few years in the Diplomatic Service, from which he had retired to take a more personal interest in the two properties of which he found himself thus fortuitously the possessor. He was a tall, thin young man with reddish hair and very blue eyes and an ugly yet attractive face. One could not immediately say exactly why he was ugly, for he had beautiful eyes and a charming smile. Both men and women liked Billy Mowbray. Although he was necessarily interested in sport of all kinds, he had something of the artistic temperament; he had studied painting abroad in his spare time, and his watercolors were fresh and strong with a note of gaiety. Thus,

while nature and fortune conspired to endow Billy with charm, talent, and material riches, the god Eros had been so far extremely unpropitious toward him. It was well known that Billy had been in love with his cousin Pamela Winton for several years, and that she had refused him with a definiteness that admitted of no appeal when at last he had timidly invited her to be his wife not many months before the opening of this story. She had become engaged almost immediately afterward to a man much older than herself, and whom she knew but slightly, and who lived for the greater part of the year on his property in northern Africa, whither she was prepared dutifully to exile herself when the appointed time came.

It made matters no better for Billy that he should dislike of all men this Ralph Mellish who had won his Pamela. Mellish had been something of a gipsy, never sticking to any place or profession, always wearying of them, and displaying a restless, dissatisfied disposition. Of late years he had seemed to weary even of change, and he had apparently settled down in Algeria, where he had bought an immense property of vines and orchards and cork-forests. Report said that he had restored a very fine old Arab house, which was now ready for his bride.

Billy had known Mellish abroad, had knocked up against him, as he himself would have expressed it, in various places, in Rio, in Rome, in Petrograd, and Washington, and even in Tokio. And it was he who had introduced him to Pamela one night at some dance, performing this presentation at Mellish's request with none too good a grace, yet entirely unsuspecting of those dire consequences that so soon ensued. Mellish was very good-looking, in his world-weary, slightly ironical way; he had fine, dark

eyes, a soft, slow, languid voice, and he was almost always found fascinating by women. He proposed to Pamela Winton, who was young and very pretty, and was accepted. Some weeks later he departed to make his house across the Mediterranean ready for his bride. Pamela was indeed at that stage of hopeless love when, had he invited her to share an oasis of the Sahara with him, she would have gone thither with as much readiness as she had agreed to go into the less rigorous and more fertile isolation of the African *Tell*.

Mrs. Blair was one of those people who are constitutionally incapable of remembering any details about other people's affairs. It had not, therefore, occurred to her that it would be wiser, under the circumstances, not to invite Pamela and Billy to the same house-party. She remembered that they had stayed there at the same time last autumn, and had then appeared to be great friends. Mrs. Blair had been known thus to invite husbands who had divorced their wives to meet the said wives, who had in the meantime changed their names. She had also, on occasion, invited old enemies to meet, people who hated each other, people who had wronged, deceived, or even duped each other. Thus her parties, if not always agreeable, had frequently great dramatic possibilities. Students of human nature, cynical psychologists, and the like, could always be sure of finding at East Feddon abundant food for their contemplation.

It may be wondered why such a person should ever have been entrusted with the secret which enfolded the profession of Scudamore. But Mrs. Blair was singularly alive to the dangers of her own position; she was also aware that if any knowledge of these practices should come to the ears of Father Benedict her time at East Feddon would be abruptly

and decisively terminated. She was no fool where her own interests were concerned. She had an intelligence of the sharp and acquisitive, rather than of the trained order, and she could guard any secret in her own interests.

Moreover, she owed her introduction to the Professor to the intervention of one of his oldest and most valued clients — Sir James Bett. And she had sufficient wealth at her command to satisfy the exacting demands of the Professor. Although he could not often be prevailed upon to visit East Feddon, and invariably chose the most inconvenient moments for doing so, Mrs. Blair was always delighted to receive him whenever opportunity offered. It was fortunate that on this occasion his visit should clash with Rupert's leave, and that Rupert had elected to invite Father Benedict.

CHAPTER III

MRS. WINTON sat opposite to her daughter Pamela in the dining-room of her charming house of Upper Brook Street, which of late years had been her principal residence. Although she was an American, there was little to betray her nationality in her speech, for she had been educated in France, and had now for many years lived almost exclusively in England. She was about forty years old, and looked rather too young to be the mother of a grown-up daughter who was already engaged to be married.

They were having luncheon, and during that meal, which had been served precisely at a quarter to one, Mrs. Winton had glanced once or twice at the clock, as if to assure herself that she was not late. Punctuality and order were the two tyrants by whom

she suffered herself to be ruled, and to their tyranny Pamela had also learned to resign herself.

Mrs. Winton was to leave Charing Cross for Paris by the afternoon train, and about half an hour later Pamela was to journey down to East Feddon, ignorant of the fact that Billy Mowbray was also one of the invited guests.

Mrs. Winton and her daughter did not resemble each other, although they patronized the same dressmaker, by which means a superficial family likeness may often be emphasized. They were, indeed, almost as entirely unlike each other as it is possible for two people to be. Mrs. Winton was rather short and inclined to be plump; she was very fair, with large pale-blue eyes, almost white lashes, and a delicate complexion. Pamela was, on the other hand, decidedly tall and slightly made, with quantities of dark hair that was both fine and soft, and dark gray eyes under long black lashes that had an upward sweep. She had a thoughtful, dreamy expression, whereas her mother's face betokened an alert, positive, and even assertive mind. Pamela, indeed, possessed scarcely anything of her mother's sense of humor, her unconquerable worldliness, her tireless activity, and nervous restlessness. They were thus so unlike that when they conversed it seemed to them both as if they were speaking across some cold and estranging sea to some person they had never known.

Mrs. Winton had not loved her English husband, and when he had died she had not pretended to be broken-hearted, but she adored her only child. If she had been capable of a morbid thought — which she was not — she would have regretted the fact that they were such strangers to each other, incapable of near approach.

Pamela's sudden engagement to Ralph Mellish

had caused her a pang of acute dismay. It had taken place about the end of July — three or four months ago — and in another six weeks Ralph was expected to arrive in England, when the marriage was to take place without delay. Indeed, one of Mrs. Winton's principal objects in going to Paris was to choose things for her daughter's trousseau. She had never liked the match, but it was characteristic of her that she had done nothing to oppose it. The engagement had been a surprise to her, as it had been to every one else.

Ralph Mellish was quite a remarkable man in his way. He belonged — on his mother's side — to a well-known family with a definite place in the social world, so that when he returned to England after one of his prolonged absences he came back to a certain assured position. He was rather well-known, too, as the author of a good many books of travel. He knew a great number of languages, and was an authority on certain obscure Oriental dialects. The appearance of Mellish during her first season eclipsed for Pamela all other personalities. There was something powerful and dominant about this man, who had commanded and led other men since he was nineteen. He was so dark and somber-looking that when dressed as an Arab he looked exactly like one, and could simulate to perfection the slow, majestic, and unhurrying gait so peculiar to the Oriental. He was a great talker, and generally had a good deal to say. From the day of their first meeting he had made a very marked impression upon Pamela. They met constantly. Mellish, a man of iron will, arranged that this should be so. He saw that Pamela was attracted by him; she was too young to have learned the hard lesson of hiding her feelings. Mellish disturbed her thoughts. She did not at first fall in love with him,

but she thought about him a great deal. His slow, languid voice lingered in her ears long after he had left her side. She rebelled at first against this influence. She tried to avoid him. Mellish was accustomed to feminine homage and he smiled a little cynically. Then suddenly he had become aware of Billy's existence. A Billy who was no longer a struggling diplomat, but a rich, prosperous Billy, who was on such perilously fraternal terms with his cousin Pamela. Two days after this awakening to a danger that appeared both proximate and menacing, Mellish proposed to Pamela, and a week later the engagement was definitely announced. The affair caused considerable comment. There was such manifest disparity in years, character, and tastes. Mrs. Winton was aghast. She was a very worldly woman, and she had great ambitions concerning her daughter. Perhaps if Pamela had been ten years older — and it was no unusual thing for women in these days to fail to get their daughters off their hands until they were nearly thirty — it may be that she would have smiled upon the proposed union. But Pamela was very young, and her innocent, fresh loveliness seemed to mark her out for something better than this, something less hazardous and withal more brilliant.

She tried to make terms, but Mellish was not a man to make terms; he did not try to propitiate Pamela's mother. Pamela must live his life, and at present that life was to be spent in the unknown fastness of Djebl Anaba. For the moment it amused him to look after his Algerian property. It was the nearest approach he had ever made to settling down. Wandering was in his blood. He hated the life of cities, and he was one of those men to whom Africa makes a violent appeal. Its fierce summer suns, its incurable savagery, its starlit desert

sands, its immense, impenetrable forests, the very space of it, its wonderful light and its still more wonderful darkness, all these he had learned to adore, and he was convinced that they would make an equally ardent appeal to Pamela.

Mrs. Winton had wept over the prospect. A villa in Algiers — yes, that sounded charming, and might even be alluded to in the future as a palace; it would be slightly more unusual than one at Nice or in Tuscany; but for Pamela to live at a remote place in the forest from year's end to year's end, in an almost savage loneliness — this thought was unbearable to her. She felt that she could not give up her daughter to so dreadful a fate. But on this point Mellish was inexorable. He did not like Mrs. Winton, and it annoyed him to be thwarted. Pamela, however, did not attempt to thwart him. She was quite docile and amenable, ready to love what her lover loved, eager to go to Djebl Anaba. She felt that she had already learned through him some of its fascination, its strange appeal. The prospect of this life spent with him in solitude attracted her, as it would have probably attracted many other girls of rather romantic disposition, to whom the unknown is always alluring. And she had learned to love this strange, wandering gipsy of a man. When he went away — to make things ready, as he said — it seemed to her that the very sun had been darkened in the sky.

Mrs. Winton had watched her daughter very attentively during the months that followed. Ralph wrote very regularly, and Pamela, after the manner of the engaged, spent many hours in the privacy of her own room, writing long letters to her betrothed.

It had been something of an effort to her to go to East Feddon, for she was not very fond of visiting, nor was she particularly intimate with the

Blairs. She had known them through Billy, who was a great friend of Rupert's. And lately she had rather avoided those friends whom she had in common with Billy. She felt that they were not quite sympathetic about her engagement; that they blamed her, perhaps, for refusing to marry Billy. Mrs. Winton had, however, been rather insistent upon the point of her going to East Feddon. She wished to spend the week in Paris, and she did not want to leave Pamela alone in town. Besides, there would be workmen in the house and everything would be in confusion. Above all, she knew that Billy would be at East Feddon, and although she had never encouraged him, believing that her daughter could make a far more brilliant match, she still considered him infinitely preferable to Mellish. He had a fine old castle in Wales, and his other property in Kent was quite charming. Mrs. Winton still hoped against hope that something would intervene, even at the eleventh hour, to put a stop to Pamela's marriage. She did not wish to lose her so completely as she would lose her if she married Mellish. And she liked Billy; he was quite frank and straightforward and trustworthy. One felt that one knew all about him, whereas no one could feel like that about Mellish. Not only did Mrs. Winton dislike Mellish, but she did not trust him. Hints of strange, unattractive stories about him had reached her ears. They were very vague and indefinite, and not a single fact could be adduced, but she felt that she could not give Pamela to him with any sense of security. It would mean so complete a surrender of her daughter. Mellish would take her away to Djebl Anaba, and she herself would only be permitted to see her when it pleased him that she should. She had always felt this tacit hostility about him; it was as if they had

measured swords — these two people, who each in their different ways loved Pamela.

But even if she interfered and stopped the marriage until Pamela was twenty-one, she knew that she could not prevent it from ultimately taking place. Pamela would inherit a considerable fortune of her own, bequeathed to her by her American grandfather, when she came of age. She would then be perfectly independent of her mother. And in the meantime Mrs. Winton knew that she would only have gained Mellish's increased dislike, and estranged herself still more from Pamela. It was not easy for Mrs. Winton to persuade herself that Pamela would ever change. Still, there was this vague chance of East Feddon — with Billy there. It was a remote spar to which she clung. She had not told Pamela, purposely, that Billy would be there. She wished them to meet suddenly like that, while Ralph Mellish was still at Djebl Anaba.

"I hope you will enjoy your visit," she said, looking across the table at her daughter and thinking irrelevantly how marvelously she had improved in looks of late; "Mrs. Blair can be very tiresome, but she generally has nice parties. And Rupert——"

"Oh, I don't suppose Rupert will be there," said Pamela, a little hastily. Rupert was one of Billy's intimate friends whom she felt she would rather not meet.

"I shall expect you home on Thursday," continued her mother. "Do not forget we are dining out that night. I shall come by the five o'clock train myself."

"I will come in good time," said Pamela; "we mustn't waste many days after this or I shall never be ready."

"You won't forget to write and thank Lady Lar-

combe for the pearl necklace? It was really a beautiful present."

"I have written." Pamela glanced at her left hand. On the third finger there was a curious ring formed of one large black pearl. This had been Mellish's gift to her. He had not asked her to choose her engagement ring, or to say what stones she preferred, which was very characteristic of him. Like most women, she would have chosen diamonds. But she liked the pearl because it was strange and unique and because Ralph had chosen it.

"I hope you will find some of your own friends there," said Mrs. Winton.

She never found it easy to talk to Pamela.

"The Saltmarshes are going," said Pamela; "they met Rupert abroad last winter, and they have already stayed there once. I don't know of any one else."

Mrs. Winton now glanced for the last time at the clock and rose from her seat, judging that it would not be prudent to delay her departure any longer.

"Well, my dear child, I must be rushing away." It was thus she described her calm, ordered, and leisurely departure. "You will start in plenty of time, won't you? I ordered the car for you at a quarter past two. There is always such a crush near the Bank! I hate those City stations myself. Good-by, and mind you take plenty of wraps. I always think Norfolk such a dreadfully cold country." She kissed Pamela, and the girl returned the embrace and accompanied her into the hall.

Mrs. Winton had one more word with her daughter. Perhaps she felt a little guilty about letting her go unwarned.

"You're not dreadfully bored at the prospect of East Feddon?" she said rather wistfully.

"Oh, no, mother," said Pamela.

"Give my love to Mrs. Blair," said Mrs. Winton as she got into the car.

Pamela went up to her own room to satisfy herself that all the preparations for her visit were quite complete. She found that her trunks had already been removed and only her dressing-bag remained on a little table. It was open, and Pamela looked round the room to see if anything had been forgotten. Her eye fell upon a photograph of Ralph Mellish which always lived on her dressing table. She took it up and examined it rather closely before putting it into the bag. It was a very good likeness of Ralph and it was faintly smiling, so that he looked less stern than usual. It was a hard face in some ways, handsome, intellectual, and with a watchful, experienced expression. It was the face of a man who has a very strong character with certain very weak places in it. This combination of weakness and strength in Ralph nearly always appealed to women, and it had appealed especially to Pamela.

As she put the photograph into the bag there was a knock at the door and her maid, Célestine, came into the room.

"Mademoiselle, the car is at the door. Mademoiselle's luggage is already in the car."

"I shall be down in a few minutes, Célestine," said Pamela, "there is plenty of time."

Now that the moment for departure had come, she began to feel a little nervous about this visit. She had not often paid visits without her mother, and the prospect of a week at East Feddon was scarcely a congenial one. She wondered idly if Célestine hated going as much as she did, whether she ever felt nervous of meeting strangers, whether there were rivalries and jealousies in that lesser society of the servants' hall. Still, when she was

married she would have little opportunity for country-house visiting. She would spend the greater part of the year in Africa. Her life would be completely altered. It would not even run in the old groove, as it would have done, for instance, had she married Billy.

As she went downstairs, still, as she thought, much too early for the train, she paused to go and fetch a book from the library. She could not at first find the one she wanted. While she was searching for it, she suddenly felt a very curious, very strong impulse to give up her journey to East Feddon. It was one of those inconsequent presentiments which often afflict rather irresolute people who do not dare run counter to them. After every very appalling disaster to train or ship it may be noticed that a number of persons come forward to relate their reasons for not traveling on that day or by that route. But Pamela was not irresolute and she quickly put the thought away from her. She took the book in her hand and went downstairs.

People were having tea in the hall when she arrived at East Feddon late in the afternoon, when already the winter darkness had fallen. The sharp air had brought a delicate color to Pamela's face, framed in the dark setting of furs. There were not apparently many guests, unless they had not yet assembled. Pamela glanced at the group and saw with some relief that they were all strangers to her. Mrs. Blair came forward and kissed her, not because she was a great friend, but because she always kissed any girls who came to stay with her. She labored under the mistaken impression that it made them feel more at home. She introduced her to Mrs. Silva and Sir James Bett, who were engaged in talking to each other.

Mrs. Silva was, like Sir James, an Anglo-Indian, and her enemies said that she was "four annas to the rupee," or, in other words, was touched with the tar-brush. Her appearance confirmed the suggestion. She was a tall, dark woman with a swarthy complexion and fine eyes, and when she spoke she clipped her words as Eurasians do. She was rather handsome, but many people found her repulsive.

As she gave Pamela a cup of tea, Mrs. Blair said:

"The Saltmarshes and Mr. Mowbray are staying here: they have gone off in the motor to-day to see Norwich Cathedral."

Pamela's face was quite impassive.

"I haven't seen Billy for quite a long time," she said.

As she spoke she remembered that she had not seen him since her engagement, or, rather, since the day when she had informed him of it. She remembered now how cold and frozen his face had been; how strangely he had looked at her. Not angrily, but almost, as it were, with compassion. He had said very little, and what he said had been quite conventional, with a studied politeness that had made her wonder whether he cared for her any more. If it had been anything of a blow to him, he had given no sign. She was too full of her own happiness to think much about him, yet after he had gone she felt as if her own joy had been a little hurt, a little spoiled, by his pain.

"Rupert is coming back to-morrow for some shooting on Saturday," said Mrs. Blair, "and Mr. Mowbray generally comes for the shooting."

Pamela sat near the fire and drank her tea. She had not felt cold all through the long, bleak journey, but at that moment she felt as if something had chilled her. Perhaps it was the knowledge that Billy was at East Feddon, that she would have to see

him again. The thought of meeting him troubled her. She wondered whether her mother had known that he would be there. Then she remembered that curious impulse she had had in the library just before leaving which seemed to warn her not to come. . . .

She glanced at her fellow-guests. Sir James had moved across to the window and Mrs. Silva was sitting near him. Their rather yellow faces seemed to have caught something of the gloom of the day. They chatted in dispirited undertones.

When Pamela had finished her tea and had gone up to her room, Mrs. Silva turned to Mrs. Blair and said in a deep, drawling voice:

"Is that really Miss Winton? I wonder why people make such a fuss about her? Or did Guy Charlton boom her?"

Guy Charlton was a kind of amateur society journalist who, it was said, could make or mar the success of any *débutante* who aspired to be a beauty. There was a hint of malice in her tone.

"Oh, don't you think her pretty?" said Mrs. Blair in her gentle, absent-minded way, as if it were really of no importance at all whether a girl were pretty or the reverse.

"So colorless, you know," said Mrs. Silva, "and she seems a little dull."

"Oh, she's not dull," said Mrs. Blair, hastening to correct this impression, for certainly Pamela had been very silent at tea. "They say she misses Ralph Mellish — the man she is engaged to. He's been gone about three months. That is always trying for a girl —a long engagement with the man away."

"Will she have money?" said Sir James, raising his melancholy eyes with a slight appearance of interest.

"Oh, yes — a great deal, I believe. Her grand-

father was that rich New York oil king, and he settled a lot on her when she comes of age."

"I should think a girl like that would be thrown away upon Mellish," said Sir James, "and he is a great deal too old for her, besides. He'd better have married the mother!"

"Wasn't there something between her and Mr. Mowbray?" inquired Mrs. Silva, who had an uncomfortably accurate memory for details.

"Yes — he is her cousin. A boy and girl affair. That's all quite past," replied Mrs. Blair.

"I heard he was simply broken-hearted and he's been hiding himself in Wales almost ever since," said Mrs. Silva.

"Well, they can't go on not meeting forever, as they are cousins," said Mrs. Blair with a touch of acerbity. "It would be absurd."

"Does she know he's here?"

"I've just told her."

"You don't think she knew before?"

"Her mother did. I suppose she told her," said Mrs. Blair.

"My dear Margaret, you are wonderfully courageous!" drawled Mrs. Silva. In spite of her drawl, which was more or less an affectation, she clipped the last two syllables of the word *wonderfully,* and pronounced it in the true Eurasian manner.

The Saltmarshes and Billy did not return until it was almost time to dress for dinner, consequently Pamela did not see her cousin till they were all assembled in the drawing-room just before that meal was announced. There was a little flush in her cheeks as she greeted him. She thought he had lost something of his boyishness; he looked older, more of a man.

"Well, Pam — how are you?" he said, with a great effort to speak lightly.

She only said: "Why, Billy, I haven't seen you for an age! What have you been doing with yourself?"

He felt that the only truthful answer he could make would be: "I've been thinking of you, Pam, dear!" And obviously it was quite impossible to venture upon such a statement.

And in spite of the pain it involved, he was glad to see her again. He thought she had never looked so lovely. She had the serene and contented expression of one who has been given her heart's desire. His glance fell upon the strange black pearl that looked so dusky against the white fairness of her hand, and all the old hatred, the old repugnance he had felt toward Ralph Mellish surged back into his heart. He had been trying to stifle it for so long that he had come to believe in its death. And now at a word, at a look, it had awakened with all its old consuming force. . . .

As he raised his eyes as if in obedience to some silent and unspoken summons he saw that Professor Scudamore was looking at him with a kind of close, almost scientific interest. There was tolerance and kindliness and even sympathy in this scrutiny. He seemed to be beaming at him from behind those large-rimmed glasses he so habitually wore. And Billy had a nervous conviction that in some obscure, unexplained way Professor Scudamore had been able to read his thoughts, and had known something of that savage, futile fury of hatred he had felt toward Ralph Mellish.

He was glad when a move was made to the dining-room. At dinner he found himself sitting next to Lady Saltmarshe, who had been spending a prolonged honeymoon in Italy. He began to discuss the painters of the Umbrian school with her, and thus he forced his thoughts from the contemplation of

those two passions which had assumed control of his life — his love for Pamela Winton and his hatred of Ralph Mellish.

CHAPTER IV

LIKE Sir James Bett, Professor Scudamore found the sharp and bleak East Anglian climate not altogether to his taste. Many persons who are indifferent about their food are excessively fastidious upon the subject of warmth. If any one had penetrated to the Professor's sanctum, a small sitting-room almost bare of furniture except for a couple of armchairs, a writing-table, and a beautiful old Chinese screen, they would have found him that November morning sitting beside a glorious fire, with a plaid shawl over his shoulders and another tucked closely over his knees. His feet were encased in warm velvet slippers of a bright green color. He wore, too, a skull-cap drawn rather tightly over his abundant hair.

His only companion was Mrs. Blair's large white Persian cat — a rather ferocious and savage specimen, which had taken a fancy either to the Professor himself or to the unvarying warmth of his apartment. It lay asleep in a basket upon a soft white fur rug that was lined with turquoise blue. If aroused by any sudden movement of the Professor it would open its wild blue eyes, and blink at him in an arrogant manner which seemed to indicate at least a haughty recognition. He, in return, nodded slightly at the cat as if to reassure it of his entirely friendly feeling toward it, and sometimes even said: "That's all right, Omar," whereupon Omar lay back again in the indolent and volup-

tuous manner of his kind and fell into a prolonged and silent sleep.

Much of the Professor's time was absorbed by writing. He wrote always upon a large block of paper laid across his knees. It was one of his peculiarities that he never used a writing-table for the purpose. He had correspondents all over the world, and as the nature of his transactions with them was essentially private, he never employed a secretary. No man was in his confidence. For the most part, he addressed his correspondents in their own language. That was another of his gifts — an uncanny ability for acquiring languages, both European and Oriental.

This morning he was engaged in writing a long letter in Arabic to a famous Kaid of northern Africa who, bitten with a desire to acquire European culture and habits, made perennial visits to Paris, Rome, and London, after which he and the only wife he acknowledged and permitted to accompany him, took a course of waters at some French or Belgian spa. This man, Ben Aziz, was a very intimate friend of the Professor's, and he was also of great value to him in some of his more recondite researches. The Arabs, being accustomed from their youth to legends of djinns and afreets, have perhaps unusual opportunities for indulging in necromantic pursuits. Twice during winters of unusual severity the Professor had exchanged the fogs, snow, and sleet of London for the agreeable sunshine and warmth of the Saharian oasis where Aziz, in spite of French occupation, was permitted to reign supreme. He held office under the French government, which gave him almost the powers of a despot as long as he never challenged its suzerainty. He had another property in the region of the Tell — a place called the Five Fountains, which he had only acquired of

recent years and which the Professor had not as yet seen.

It was to him the Professor was still writing, in the dots, curves, and dashes of Oriental caligraphy, when a knock at the door interrupted him.

Omar opened his blue eyes and blinked.

"Come in," said Professor Scudamore.

He did not lay down his pen, but looked up in a detached way to greet his visitor. Billy Mowbray entered the room.

"Good morning, Professor," he said. "I hope I am not disturbing you. Am I too early?"

The clock pointed to three minutes to eleven.

"By three minutes only," said Professor Scudamore. "Please sit down." He resumed his writing, and there was silence except for the slight scratching sound of his quill until the clock struck the hour. Then he put aside pen and paper, and turned his bright, almost eager scrutiny upon his visitor.

Billy who, as has been seen, possessed something of the artistic temperament, kept in check to a certain extent by his healthy, active, sporting proclivities, was sufficiently impressionable to experience a slight sense of discomfiture beneath that glance. It seemed to go right through him, searching mind and body, as well as the deeper and more obscure recesses of the soul. He felt as transparent as if he had been placed under the lens of a Rœntgen-ray apparatus. Not that he had anything particular to hide — a fact for which at that moment he remembered to be thankful. He was a singularly straightforward and frank young man, with an excellent disposition and nothing much to screen from the eyes of a critical world which, on the whole, had dealt very kindly with him. Even his love for Pamela had not been a secret. During the few

months between her *début* and her engagement it had been freely discussed, and some people had been bold enough to prophesy that Billy would be successful in the end. He had known her all her life, and it seemed to him that he had really been in love with her for years. Yet he hesitated to speak. He would wait a little. She should go through her first season, and then he would ask her to marry him. He did this for her own sake. He wanted her to be quite sure of her own heart, and not to mistake that warm, sisterly liking she had for him for any deeper feeling. He held a little aloof, yet he was always there if she wanted him. And then Ralph Mellish had stepped in and abruptly carried off his prize from him. This had completely upset, for Billy, the balance of things. He was not morbid, but he knew that he had then then learned something of the meaning of the word "broken-hearted." And he had not seen her again until Mrs. Blair had thus indiscreetly and without warning gathered them both under her roof.

Billy could, no doubt, have left East Feddon had he so desired. As it was, he decided to remain, painful though such a course threatened to prove. He was still so much in love with Pamela that to see her day by day gave him crumbs in the midst of a gnawing starvation. But he did not see her alone. She avoided that, and he was too wise to make any attempt to secure an interview. He had nothing to say to her. She had chosen, and it was not for him to question her choice. Yet why she should have preferred Mellish to Billy was a problem which had exercised many minds besides poor Billy's.

It may have been that familiarity had bred, if not contempt, a certain blindness to much that was attractive about Billy. He was her cousin; she had always known him; she was inclined to take him for

granted. Ralph, on the other hand, represented the unknown. And Pamela was in love with him, whereas she only loved Billy as she might have loved her brother, had she had one.

"Mrs. Blair has been telling me about you, Professor," said Billy, taking the proffered chair and sitting so that the light — such as there was — fell full upon his face.

"Yes?" said the Professor.

He had decided last night, after a brief survey of the young man, to admit him to the ranks of the initiated.

"Of course, I don't believe in it at all. Manifestations — and all that kind of thing. Still, it interested me very much."

"I could very soon make you believe," said the Professor, in his dry, colorless way.

Although he spoke so quietly, Billy could not help feeling that he was making no idle boast.

"That is, of course," he added, "if you wish to go further than a mere general interest."

Billy stooped down to caress Omar, who swiftly put out a white, furry paw and dug his nails fiercely into the intruding hand. As Billy released his hand he saw that there were three little clots of blood upon the back of it.

"Omar is not friendly to you, Mr. Mowbray," said the Professor; "but cats are very curious. They are really far more impressionable and subtle than dogs. A dog is extremely terrified before the simplest psychical phenomenon; a cat will often, on the other hand, attack."

"Attack?" repeated Billy.

"I mean that people will take a bull-dog with them when they go to investigate a haunted house, whereas it would be far more sensible to take a highly bred cat. These are not only more pro-

foundly susceptible, but they are not rendered cowards — as a dog almost invariably is. A cat has been known to attack an intruding and hostile intelligence."

The Professor had a cold and commonplace way of imparting information which often increased the effect of his words upon his listeners. Billy was conscious that he felt thrilled and slightly uncomfortable. Only the Professor was such a commonplace figure, sitting there huddled up in his two shawls with his feet encased in bright green velvet slippers, and the skull-cap drawn over his abundant gray hair, that it was impossible to feel a genuine fear in his presence, which was at once reassuring and slightly sinister.

"That is why I do not allow Omar to remain with me at night," continued Professor Scudamore. "If we summon intelligences, I feel that we owe them at least civility — immunity from attack. . . . Your hand is still bleeding, Mr. Mowbray."

Billy wiped his hand with a handkerchief. He had forgotten all about the slight wound. He was deeply interested in what the Professor was saying.

"By the way," he said, "there's a new arrival — Father Benedict Chilver — the famous Jesuit preacher. Mrs. Blair has a wonderful talent for forming Noah's Ark parties, hasn't she?" He laughed good-humoredly.

"Father Benedict does not come at her invitation, Mr. Mowbray," said the Professor, "he is her stepson's friend."

"Do you know him?" asked Billy.

"I have not that pleasure. But I have heard him preach. My work, Mr. Mowbray, involves a deep knowledge of religion — a study, indeed, of all religions. Religion has hitherto practically held a monopoly in the unseen. But her sway is threat-

ened. Science — exact knowledge of the forces that govern this world — the increasing study of spiritism — are slowly making what she has taught to be of faith a matter of common information. The Catholic Church "— here he cleared his throat — "will be the last of that kind of institution to fail. Her power is so deeply rooted. But she scarcely realizes what a powerful foe she possesses in spiritism. With her absurd claim to infallibility, her prohibition of any dabbling or research into things occult, her perpetual 'thus far and no farther,' she has too long sealed men's eyes and stopped their ears. This man Chilver is a fanatic in his own line. He happens to have made a special study of these things, having, it is said, once had to deal with a case of so-called depravity consequent upon the pursuit of spiritism. Science in all ages has her victims, Mr. Mowbray; no vast work of any kind, whether constructive or destructive, can be successfully promoted without a corresponding loss of life. The very statistics of trade will teach you that. Still, with regard to Chilver, he will know nothing of the reason of my presence here. Mrs. Blair, though singularly careless about many things — she is unwise and indiscreet to a point one seldom meets with — knows better than to divulge my profession to the uninitiated."

"She told me, though," said Billy, a little astonished.

"With my permission," said the Professor, "even, I may say, at my suggestion."

"Will you tell me why?" said Billy.

"It is not necessary at present. Later I may do so. I asked you to come and see me this morning because I thought you might find one or two of the things I had to tell you of interest."

Billy took out a capacious cigarette-case and of-

fered one to the Professor, who, however, declined.

"I never smoke, thank you. I do not require narcotics. I study the art of keeping my brain alert and active. To soothe or stupefy it is absurd."

Mowbray lit a cigarette thoughtfully.

"I should so much like to know why you wanted to talk to me," he said, in his pleasant, frank way.

"For one thing, I was sorry for you, but that has nothing to do with my ultimate reason."

"Sorry for me?" repeated Billy. "Why, no one is ever sorry for me. I have inherited two fortunes to which I had no claim."

He spoke without any touch of cynicism.

The Professor shrugged his shoulders.

"But you have lost the treasure of the heart," he said, in his dry, emotionless way.

Billy flushed up to the roots of his reddish hair,

"It is a great pity," continued Professor Scudamore, "because you could have made her love you. And she would have loved you very deeply, very intensely, to the exclusion of everything and of every one else."

"Oh, I'm afraid you are mistaken there, Professor," said Billy, trying to speak lightly. "She never cared at all about me. We were excellent friends, and my falling in love with her has ended our friendship. That was almost the worst part of it. Until yesterday I hadn't seen her since she told me about her engagement. Our meeting here was another of dear Mrs. Blair's blunders!" There was a touch of ironic bitterness in his speech.

"And you accept the situation?"

"What else can I do?"

"You could risk another chance," said the Professor meditatively.

"I shouldn't care to," said Billy. "She is very devoted to Mellish — that's the name of the man

she is going to marry. And in any case, she has given her word to him. It would be dishonorable now to speak, even if there was the slightest chance of her changing her mind, which there isn't."

"Miss Winton," remarked the Professor, "is endowed with very high mediumistic qualities. They have never been put to the test and she is quite ignorant of the fact."

"And I hope she will remain so," said Billy, with some decision. "She would pooh-pooh the whole thing."

"You are sure of this?"

"Oh, yes — I know her pretty well. She is not what Mrs. Blair would call One of Us. But, then, I'm not, either. As I tell you, I don't believe in it a little bit!"

He was aware that the Professor's eyes were now fixed very steadily upon him, open, bright, almost smiling, behind the large-rimmed glasses. And as he sat there, with the half-finished cigarette between his fingers, he had an eerie sensation that Scudamore was influencing him in some quite undefined but very powerful manner. It did not amount to hypnotism, but it seemed to Billy that he was trying to convey to him, without actually pronouncing it, some such sentence as this: "*You are going to believe just what I choose to teach you. I want your help and your faith for some purpose of my own.*"

He had an actual physical sensation as of cold water trickling slowly, continuously, down his spine.

"But I'm always open to conviction," said Billy, in his frank, charming way, that was so boyish and ingenuous, and often gave people the idea that he was much younger than he really was. "I like listening to all sorts of people. I'm enormously interested in — in everything, Professor. I want to

meet this Jesuit, too. They say he is the most powerful unofficial person in England to-day."

"Nevertheless, his presence in the house is prejudicial to effort," said Professor Scudamore. "If Mrs. Blair had asked me, I should have advised against it."

"But the Saltmarshes were crazy to meet him — they had told Rupert so. I suppose that is why he arranged to come himself and to bring Father Benedict."

"Let him convert the Saltmarshes, then, if he can," said the Professor, "from what I hear they are ripe to fall into his hand. I do not require their assistance. I require yours. Are you prepared to serve in my camp, Mr. Mowbray?"

And again he fixed upon Billy that curious, searching glance, at once so mysterious and so penetrating.

"Oh, I can't bind myself down to anything, you know," said Billy easily; "but if you have a séance while you are here — and Mrs. Blair told me she hoped that there would be something of the kind — I'd like to come immensely. That wouldn't prevent me from sitting at Father Benedict's feet earlier in the day, would it?"

"Of course it would not. Do you intend, may I ask, that Miss Winton should also sit at his feet?"

"Oh, I've no control over Miss Winton's actions," said Billy, smiling. "She might be of use to you, mightn't she? as you say she is a medium. What I'm afraid of is that she might laugh and introduce a frivolous element, and disgust the spooks so much that they wouldn't give us a show at all."

"I do not intend to invite her to my séance," replied the Professor. "The control that has lately presented itself is not one that I can invite every one to meet. Especially ladies. They are so nervous and easily alarmed. It is a peculiarity of women

that they will go all lengths to set fire to a thing, and then they are the first to be terrified at the sight of the flames. We find that over and over again, especially at séances when they have entreated us to let them be present in spite of our advice to the contrary."

"And Mrs. Blair?" said Billy.

The Professor shrugged his shoulders.

"She has neither nerves nor temperament," he answered. "Her presence is a purely negative one. Well, I shall expect you to-night at eleven o'clock. The others will join us when every one else has gone to bed. We shall have to be additionally careful not to excite attention or curiosity, on account of the presence of this priest and of young Mr. Blair. It is extremely necessary that they should not get wind of what is going forward. We can have a talk first, if you will be good enough to give me your company again."

Regarding this as a courteously conveyed dismissal, Billy rose from his seat, flung the end of his cigarette into the fire, and held out his hand.

"I shall be frightfully keen to come, and to stay for the séance, Professor," he said, smiling. "And, by the way, who are the others?"

"Sir James Bett and Mrs. Silva," was the reply. "We shall be three men and three women — the medium is a woman. I think that should make it perfectly safe."

His eyes glittered behind the spectacles.

"It is possible the results may be extremely interesting," he added thoughtfully.

CHAPTER V

IT NOT infrequently happens through perhaps some subtle process of thought-transference, akin in some measure to the science of wireless telegraphy, that when it is desired to avoid a particular topic at a particular time, that subject will almost certainly be mentioned and discussed, as if the very wish to eschew it should be productive of its introduction. It was so at East Feddon on the night of Father Benedict's arrival.

The priest was extremely unlike all the Jesuits of fiction. He was a short, very spare, and ascetic-looking man, with white hair and bright blue eyes. His face was very pale, and he looked delicate and rather melancholy. Those who had expected to find a man of strikingly Savonarola-like aspect were disappointed. Little Lady Saltmarshe had looked forward eagerly to meeting him, but she was hardly prepared to see a person of pronouncedly Anglo-Saxon type, and wished that he had resembled a somber Velasquez portrait.

She and Miss Winton divided the honors as far as beauty was concerned, although Lady Saltmarshe, newly married, radiantly happy, and wearing fine jewels and the most exquisite and artistic Paris raiment, held various advantages over the less animated girl, with her tranquil loveliness and the almost exaggerated simplicity of her attire. Lady Saltmarshe was very fair, with golden hair, dark blue eyes, and perfect little features. She resembled an old French miniature, so delicate in line and coloring was her face. Pamela Winton, with her soft masses of dark hair and her eyes of deepest gray, possessed a more reticent loveliness, and people were immensely divided upon the question of their rival

claims to beauty. Billy was perhaps the only one present who secretly believed that there could be no two opinions on the subject.

"Cecil and I have just been staying in a haunted house," said Lady Saltmarshe, half-way through dinner. "One silly man stayed up all night to photograph the ghost — or shoot it — I forget which. The only things he saw were a rat and about a thousand black beetles. I think I should have minded that much more than seeing a ghost!"

Mrs. Blair glanced nervously at the Professor, but his face was absolutely expressionless, and he went on eating his dinner as if for him haunted houses had no interest at all. But Father Benedict looked up sharply.

"Had the ghost been seen recently?" he asked.

Lady Saltmarshe turned to her husband.

"How long was it, Cecil?" she asked.

"Oh, about three weeks before we went there," said Lord Saltmarshe. "It was the ghost of a — a monk. . . ."

A slight pause followed, as if it were considered rather tactless to refer to ghostly monks before a priest.

But Father Benedict leaned forward with renewed attention.

"That interests me very much. I have had some experience in exorcising haunted houses. Can you tell me the legend of this apparition?"

Lady Saltmarshe turned appealingly to her husband, who in appearance looked scarcely older than herself, so round and pink and boyish was his face.

"Yes," he said, in a rather embarrassed tone; "it is the story of a monk who was murdered. At an early age he had renounced the world and entered the Benedictine Order. During the persecutions under Elizabeth, he went abroad for a time, but on

hearing of the dangerous illness of his mother he resolved to visit England secretly, fearing that otherwise she might die without receiving the Last Sacraments. He had one brother, who had become not only an apostate, but was so imbued with vindictive hatred of the Faith that he had actually assisted in seizing priests. So that the monk knew he was running into more than common danger in visiting his old home. His sister, however, succeeded in hiding him in a little room in the tower. He remained there for some days, saying Mass daily in his hiding-place. One night the queen's emissaries came to search the house. They insisted that this priest had been traced thither. The brother naturally denied all knowledge of him, and satisfied them with his answers so that they went away. During the night the mother became very much worse, and the priest crept down to give her the Last Sacraments. As he was returning to his hiding-place his brother encountered him, and, fearful of the punishment he should bring upon the house — for to harbor a priest was a criminal offense — he attacked him with his sword and left him there dying. The monk, however, managed to creep back to the tower, though he had been so severely wounded in one of his legs that he could scarcely limp along the passage. It was said that he had had with him a relic of the True Cross, which had been entrusted to him, besides the empty pyx, and that neither of these could be found. It was thought his brother might have destroyed them in order to conceal all trace of his sojourn in the house. The ghost wears the black habit of the Benedictines, and can be heard limping painfully along the passage and up the stairs to the tower room. When seen he appears always to be searching for something — perhaps for the

Church's treasures, which he inadvertently lost in the struggle."

Both Father Benedict and Professor Scudamore listened attentively to this narrative.

"It is the sound that most frequently haunts the place," continued Lord Saltmarshe. "People who have never heard the story have been alarmed by the limping, halting footsteps."

Miss Winton gave a little shudder. The Professor's bright and steel-like eyes were fixed upon Lord Saltmarshe.

"And you saw nothing of this — this manifestation?" he said in his cold, emotionless voice.

"Nothing at all, and considering all things I was delighted not to have my nerves put to the test!" replied Lord Saltmarshe.

"The house should be visited by a priest," said Father Benedict gravely; "it is possible that the wicked brother may have hidden the body of the murdered priest away somewhere, denying it Christian burial. Mass should be said for the repose of his soul. He was little less than a martyr."

"I should like to know your theory," said Billy. "Is this manifestation the spirit of the monk, or is it a wicked spirit capable of haunting what was once the place of such evil happenings?"

"It is impossible to say," said Father Benedict. "The Church gives no explanation of such phenomena. But it has certainly happened more than once that persons have, at the time of their death, appeared to those whom they knew and loved on earth, often from a considerable distance. It has even happened that they have made a deliberate and audible request for prayers to be made for the repose of their souls."

Mrs. Blair looked slightly uncomfortable.

In the brief silence that followed, Professor Scudamore addressed Father Benedict.

"I imagine," he said, "that there is no probability of your Church rescinding her prohibition against the cult of spiritism and the like?"

"None whatever. It is entirely condemned. In view," he added, "of the very grave risks involved."

"You find, perhaps," pursued the Professor, imperturbably, "that you lose your hold over Catholics who have taken up such practices?"

"Such cases are not unknown," said Father Benedict. "Perhaps you are aware that Wallace affirmed once that in a quarter of a century no convert from the ranks of spiritualists had ever been made? It was an incorrect statement, but it is nevertheless exceedingly difficult to win back to the Church a person who has strayed in that particular manner."

"Still, there have been instances when persons have been induced by spirits to become Catholics, to start missions and so forth," said Sir James.

"That may well be," said the priest, "but the Church condemns it nevertheless. Such persons, on being received, would immediately have to forego the practice. Occasionally the spirits will lure them on to be received into the Church, trusting to their own power to compel them subsequently to apostasize, thus completing the destruction of their souls. It is because the Church believes in the existence of the devil seeking to devour that she condemns spiritualism, by which means innocent persons are brought into direct rapport with the Powers of Evil."

"Why should you imagine they are all evil spirits? Why should they not be good and holy ones?" inquired Mrs. Silva, with a touch of impatience in her manner.

"By their works ye shall know them," said Fa-

ther Benedict. "Show me any case where the practice of spiritualism has not resulted in a deliberate degradation of the individual. Why is it that in very advanced cases of the kind our one remedy should be that of ——"

He paused, looking round the table as if he hesitated to say any more. Sir James's face was politely interrogative.

"That of exorcism," he concluded.

"I take it you have never been present at a materialization?" said Professor Scudamore.

"No, I have not," said the priest gravely, "nor would I expose myself to the dangers thus involved. I am not without knowledge of the subject, Mr. Scudamore. And I go further — I would not remain willingly for a single night under a roof where I had reason to believe such wicked experiments were being carried on!"

Mrs. Blair was beginning to feel almost acutely miserable. She had not been able to divert the conversation into other channels, and now every one was obviously so profoundly interested in the discussion that it had attained a point when it was impossible to prevent its continuation. She was the more distressed because it had been definitely arranged that she and Billy Mowbray, Sir James Bett, and Mrs. Silva were to assist at a séance that very night in the Professor's study.

Mrs. Silva and Sir James Bett were both ardent and fearless spiritualists, learned also in the subject of theosophy. Both were passionately interested in the success of the newly discovered French medium, a young girl called Marcelle. Billy was to be initiated that night because the Professor had insisted that the number of men should at least equal the number of ladies who intended to be present. Those of the party who were unaware of

the arrangement were Father Benedict, Lord and Lady Saltmarshe, and Rupert Blair, who alone appeared slightly bored by the conversation.

No one, fortunately, betrayed any guilty knowledge, which was a relief to Mrs. Blair. Sir James Bett's lean, yellow face was incapable of changing color, or of expressing anxiety or emotion. Mrs. Silva was a woman of the world who could look any one in the face and lie. She felt some contempt for the Jesuit, despising a man who could submit himself to the servile obedience demanded of him by his superiors, and who at their command could hold such narrow and bigoted views. Billy alone glanced with meaning at Professor Scudamore, whose return gaze was quite blank and singularly expressionless.

"But don't you think you are rather doing what is vulgarly called flogging a dead horse?" asked Lord Saltmarshe.

"You are perhaps not aware of the enormous recent growth of spiritistic practices," said Father Benedict. "In the last century it was, of course, at one time very much the fashion in the days of Daniel Home. It has never quite died out, and it has been of late years considerably strengthened by the additional knowledge acquired by people who have been resident in the East, and have become acquainted with the methods obtaining in those countries. Lately there has been a marked recrudescence of the evil. But the practices are carried on very secretly. A man who is known to pursue them is almost always considered untrustworthy in the management of his affairs, and to forfeit the confidence of others is a hardship to the average Englishman. Those cases which have come into the law courts have confirmed the opinion that the spiritualist is the last person to fill a position of trust."

CHAPTER V

As he made this speech he regarded Sir James Bett somewhat fixedly, but it was noticeable even then to Mrs. Blair that that quondam official's face remained quite unmoved. Yet if report spoke truly it was a speech which must have touched sharply an ancient sore.

It was at this point that Billy Mowbray began to reconsider his own resolve to be present. He was sufficiently prudent to realize that if he attended the séance he would be exposing himself, according to the theory held by Father Benedict, as the representative of a very old and wise spiritual system, to an obscure but very definite danger.

He would be, in short, coquetting with the denizens of those courts of darkness who were ever ready to enter into communication with persons whose destruction they desired.

Satan was to Father Benedict a real personality and power, reigning over those unseen courts, commanding their evil denizens as they went forth in pitiless pursuit of those whom they sought to devour.

When dinner was over Billy approached Professor Scudamore, who, contrary to his usual custom, had accompanied the other guests into the drawing-room. Perhaps he thought that his absence might give rise to inquisitive comment.

"Father Benedict has made me want to cry off, Professor," he said in his easy, pleasant way. "I'm not a Catholic, but I have an immense respect for the Church and for that unchanging, hard, dogmatic teaching of hers. All the other churches seem to say: 'Believe in us and then believe whatever else you like.' But the Catholic Church says: 'Believe only in what I tell you to believe, because I am

divinely inspired.' It is a wonderful thing, if you come to think of it, that she should go on and on and never change, and be always ready to say quite definitely: 'This is right and that is wrong.'"

"Oh, if you like to be told what you are to do and what you are not to do, there's nothing like the Catholic Church," said the Professor, with the faintest touch of irritability in his even voice. "Weak people who have no individual judgment are her legitimate prey, Mr. Mowbray!"

And he blinked at Billy behind his large-rimmed glasses.

But Billy stood his ground.

"Now, is Father Benedict exactly what you'd call a weak man?" he asked.

The Professor smiled.

"He is the son of a system — of a very old system. From boyhood he has been brought up with one end in view. He is the child of Catholic parents. His youth was passed in seminaries where eyes are blinded and hearing dulled. Now you see in him the result of suggestion — suggestion continued over a great number of years by a succession of superiors until it has reached the permanent stage of auto-suggestion. I am inclined to attribute all prayer and states of prayer — especially in its higher degrees — to the effects of an exaggerated auto-suggestion."

"And you think him therefore a weak man?" pursued Billy, rather inexorably.

"Not necessarily weak. But he has deliberately forfeited all claim to individual judgment. He has no freedom of soul. He can contribute nothing that is not in strict accordance with the limited knowledge, the limited authority, of the Church to which he submits."

"Yet it seemed to me," said Billy, "when he was speaking just now that he spoke with immense authority and immense knowledge. I felt that he was very strong, very powerful, with a will of iron and a tenacity that was almost fierce. A man who would die for the cause he had at heart. If I were a Catholic and such a man were my director, I should obey him implicitly. As it is, I am inclined — very strongly inclined — to respect his warning about tampering with spiritualism."

The Professor looked at Billy with some surprise. There was pity as well as surprise in the look. Then he held his head very erect, and the calm, bright, and unflinching scrutiny of his strange eyes were fixed steadfastly upon the younger man.

He did not speak, and yet it seemed to Billy almost as if he had spoken and had told him that he must either submit to him or submit to the teaching of this other man who had obviously so profoundly impressed him. He felt, indeed, as if these two men — Father Benedict and Professor Scudamore — were engaged in a mute but none the less passionate conflict for the possession of his soul. . . .

Billy was temperamentally impressionable, and he did not like this sensation of being an object for the possession of which two men, both almost unknown to him, were fighting. He was stirred into revolt. It was one of those moments of illumination when a person becomes distinctly aware of a definite fact that has yet not been communicated to him. He did not in the least know which was right of the two men who were so violently opposed to each other in this matter. But he felt assured that for some subtle reason Professor Scudamore wished very much, very earnestly, to win his assistance and

his sympathy. He had not said so, but Billy felt convinced it was the case, and incidentally he wondered why this should be so. If any reason dimly formulated itself in his mind, he thought it might be because the Professor knew he was very well off, and desired perhaps to obtain funds for his experiments. Yet there had been something in his manner which altogether belied such a sordid self-seeking motive. It was as if he wished in some unexplained way to befriend Billy himself, to render him some assistance in the matter of Pamela Winton. Billy did not in the least know how this could be, nor even how the Professor could have acquired quite so much knowledge about anything so intimate and private as his attitude toward his cousin. It was true that he loved her, and loved her very deeply, and to the detriment of his present peace of mind, but he had no wish to urge her to break off her engagement to Ralph Mellish. That was quite another thing. Ralph was absent, and although Billy disliked him, he could never, being always frank and straightforward himself, have endeavored to make use of that absence by trying to win Pamela from him. Yet the Professor had that morning conveyed the intimation to him that this task was within his power — that if he chose he could still have won and kept Pamela's love. Billy did not in the least believe this, but even if he had he would have considered such a course both dishonorable and unworthy.

"Well, Mr. Mowbray," said the Professor in his tranquil, detached way, "you know best what you wish to do. If you do come to-night I think I can promise that I shall obtain your belief as well as your permanent interest, and that I shall pave the way for further experiences which may materially alter your future life. But I can see that this priest has made a very strong impression upon you.

I am sure you will wish to have a talk with him. It is curious, is it not? — to know that he would leave the house at this moment, to the dismay of Lady Saltmarshe, if he had any idea why I am here and what it is that I am going to do. The Church is the greatest enemy we have. It is not that she does not believe in us, but that she believes too much. She ascribes everything to the devil."

And turning rather abruptly, he left the room noiselessly and almost unnoticed. No one ever missed Professor Scudamore. He came and went like some pale and indefinite shadow.

However, on this occasion he was not only missed, but by no less a person than Father Benedict, who had been impressed by his share in the conversation at dinner. He began to ask questions of Mrs. Blair. They sat rather apart from the others, for Sir James Bett and Mrs. Silva were earnestly talking together in a corner, and the younger members of the party had made a move into the adjoining room where the piano stood.

"He is a friend of yours — this Mr. Scudamore?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I've known him for some little time. But this is only the second time he has been to East Feddon. I got it into my head that Rupert didn't care about him."

Mrs. Blair believed in a disarming assumption of frankness.

"I suppose you do not know if he is addicted to spiritistic practices?"

Mrs. Blair parried the question. Her face wore a puzzled, absent-minded look, as if she were not paying complete attention to what Father Benedict was saying.

"Oh, what makes you think that?" she said. "Something he said at dinner?"

"He gave me the impression that he had some personal and perhaps technical knowledge of the subject," said the priest gravely.

"Oh, he's quite a clever little man — he knows a lot about all sorts of things."

"It struck me that he perhaps knew a great deal more about this particular thing than he wished to say," he returned. "More than he wished us to think he knew!"

Mrs. Blair thought this more than likely, but she only said:

"Ah, you are so very clever and subtle, Father. I think you often see more than there is to see!"

She had carried the war, so to speak, into the enemy's country. But it had no effect upon Father Benedict's pursuit of the subject.

"I should not be at all surprised if he were in the habit of conducting experiments of the kind. May I give you a word of advice, Mrs. Blair?"

"Certainly," she said. Her eyes had still their blank, inattentive look.

"Well, don't let him do it here," he said earnestly.

She laughed in a vague way.

"What makes you think he would want to?"

"Lady Saltmarshe is just the kind of young and thoughtless, perhaps, rather frivolous woman who might be led into it."

"Into it?"

"Yes, into spiritism. It is a very absorbing thing, Mrs. Blair. I have had to deal in my life with some of its unhappy, ruined, degraded victims."

"Oh, how interesting!" she said. "How did you deal with them?"

"I exorcised them," said the priest briefly.

"You really think you can cast out devils?" She was smiling at him now.

He said gravely: "It is not easy to bring back to the Church those who have deliberately apostatized through spiritualism."

"I have always thought it must be so interesting. Engrossing — and consoling," she said.

The priest looked at her. His face was sad.

"At first it is consoling. That is how it draws people . . . into a net from which they can seldom or never escape."

"You have very strong opinions on the subject, Father," she said.

He nodded.

"You would prevent any one you cared for — any one in whom you were interested — from being drawn into it?"

"Certainly I should. I should try to prevent any one in the world from submitting to its degrading thraldom." He paused. "When Lord Saltmarshe was telling us about the haunted house, did you notice Mr. Scudamore's face?"

"Not . . . not particularly."

"Well, I did," said Father Benedict. "It made a very strong impression upon me."

"I must tell you," she said, thankful to be able to divert his mind from the subject of spiritualism, "that this story of the murdered monk has impressed Lord Saltmarshe very much. It is one of the reasons why he was so particularly anxious to meet you. He wishes to ask your advice. I think that without much effort you could very quickly persuade him and his wife to become Catholics."

"Indeed?" said the priest coldly, accepting the assertion quite without emotion.

"They are very dissatisfied, too, because on his property there is an old church — a pre-Reforma-

tion church. And among the archives there is an account of some money which was left for the purpose of having Masses said for the soul of one of his ancestors. Of course, since the days of Elizabeth the Masses have never been said, and when Lord Saltmarshe spoke to the present rector about it, he was extremely indignant and referred him to one of the Thirty-nine Articles. But I should like you to have a talk with him."

"Certainly," said the priest gravely. "You have no Catholics staying here now, have you, Mrs. Blair?"

"Oh, no, none," she said. "But Lady Saltmarshe was educated in a convent abroad. She told me that if you said Mass to-morrow morning she would like to be present. They are a charming young couple."

Father Benedict rose, for Mrs. Blair now got up and moved across to the next room. He followed her more slowly; his eyes upon the ground. Every one was now assembled in the music-room. The Saltmarshes and Pamela Winton were sitting together. Billy was talking to Sir James Bett about Persia. Mrs. Silva was listening with indolent indifference to Rupert Blair's description of the day's shooting.

Mrs. Blair invited Lord Saltmarshe to sing. He had a very agreeable light tenor voice, very highly trained. Miss Winton moved across to the piano to play his accompaniment. The song he chose was Lockhart's "Wandering Knight's Song."

Billy stopped speaking to Sir James Bett, and, leaning his elbow upon a little inlaid Moorish table, he rested his head upon his hand. He was watching Pamela Winton. She sat there very tranquilly, her white fingers moving rapidly and easily over the keys. She was a very accomplished musician. To-

night she wore unrelieved black and the soft sleeves of her dress scarcely reached to the elbows, disclosing her arms, which were rather long and thin. On her left hand she wore the curious black pearl which Ralph had given her.

As he watched, the words of the song — those passionate, thrilling words — held Billy's attention.

"My ornaments are arms,
My pastime is in war;
My bed is cold upon the wold,
My lamp yon star.

"My journeyings are long,
My slumbers short and broken . . .
From hill to hill I wander still
Kissing thy token . . .

"I ride from land to land,
I sail from sea to sea . . .
Some day more kind I fate might find,
Some night kiss thee . . . Some night kiss thee . . ."

He sang it very quietly with a kind of restraint that was almost dramatic. And as Billy listened and watched he saw a curious expression come over Pamela's face. It was a look almost of fear. He felt that the song had stirred her, and he longed to go across the room and speak to her, and tell her quite conventionally that she had played beautifully. But he did not move. The words of the song echoed in his ears, and stabbed him to a sudden pain. Then he became aware that Sir James had resumed the conversation:

"When I was last in Teheran," he said, "I had a long talk with Willoughby ——"

Although for half an hour longer he listened with apparent attention to Sir James, his whole thoughts

were full of Pamela. He realized anew, so it seemed to him, how greatly he loved her. She was so delicately beautiful, so full of charm and grace. He thought he had never seen any other woman with such a grave, serene expression. He began again to feel that dull rage in his heart against Mellish, who had stepped in and conquered so easily.

Then he remembered Professor Scudamore's words, telling him that he could still win her love. There had been to Billy at the time something sinister and eerie about this suggestion. It had been like a definite and uttered temptation. And he was quite certain that she loved Ralph Mellish. He had seen them together, had watched them as they danced and talked together. In a few weeks' time Pamela would be Mellish's wife, and would perhaps already be on her way to Djebl Anaba, where he preferred to live a life of almost complete solitude. It was evidently his intention to impose that solitude upon Pamela — Pamela, who was only nineteen, and so young and beautiful. Mellish was over forty, and was beginning to prefer a quiet existence with plenty of sunshine. Billy hated to think of Pamela in exile. She had lived a great deal of her life in London; she had spent some time in Paris; she had traveled abroad with her mother, and she took a keen interest in all that related to art and music and literature. Mrs. Winton had given her the kind of education which Americans so wisely give to their daughters whenever they can afford it. Pamela had had this kind of comprehensive, cosmopolitan education. And now she was going to exile herself quite voluntarily from her old surroundings; she was going to give up the world for Ralph Mellish. And as Billy looked at her he felt angry with Ralph because he could be so monstrously selfish as to accept such a sacrifice.

As she moved away from the piano she came slowly across the room. And as she passed Billy she smiled at him. Her manner to him had lost nothing of its old friendliness.

His mind was made up. He would at least learn exactly what Professor Scudamore had meant by his strange words. He would discover for what purpose — good or evil — he required his assistance. To-night, at least, he would not seek out Father Benedict and talk to him.

And if his conscience in any way condemned him for this decision he attributed it only to the very uneasy impression caused by the priest's warnings on the subject of spiritualism.

CHAPTER VI

PROFESSOR SCUDAMORE was quite alone when Billy entered the room that night exactly upon the stroke of eleven.

There was a large fire blazing on the hearth, and the Professor was once more wrapped up in his two plaid shawls. He had now discarded the conventional evening dress which he had worn earlier in the evening, and had donned a marvelous Oriental robe with a bold Chinese design embroidered upon it. He wore also the black skull-cap and the green velvet slippers.

Billy lit a cigarette and smoked thoughtfully, waiting for the Professor to speak, which it seemed he was in no hurry to do. After a considerable pause, during which Billy felt that his eyes were watching him very closely, he said placidly:

"I was very deeply interested in Lord Saltmarshe's story. I know the house quite well. A

year ago I visited it — not under my own name, of course. But I was more fortunate than he was, and I had the good luck to see the murdered monk."

Billy felt his blood run cold. "You saw him?" he said, wondering if the Professor had deliberately summoned that ghostly victim of the days of persecution.

"Yes." The Professor paused. "I also photographed him. My most successful experiments have been in photography. It is perhaps the branch of spiritualism in which most fraud is practised. Faked spirit-photographs can be made by the thousand. Now, Mr. Mowbray, we have, I think, a few minutes before the others come. May I try a very simple experiment upon you? If so, will you kindly hold this letter in your hand? Do not think consciously of anything or any one. Assume as far as possible the passive state."

Billy saw no particular objection to this, although for the moment he would have preferred to hear a little more about the Professor's experiences with the murdered monk. This experiment did not seem to him in any way connected with ordinary spiritualism. As he took the paper which was now offerred to him he glanced at it, and observed that it was not of English make — nor even, probably, of European make. It resembled a very thin, very supple, parchment. And the writing on it, revealed as he held it a little nearer to the flames — for there was no other light in the room except that of the fire — was Oriental. The twists and curves and dashes and dots, written from right to left, were in brownish ink. Billy felt rather than knew that this writing was illegible of its kind. It was irregular, and the spaces between the lines were all different, some wider than others, some narrower. He leaned

back in his chair and threw his cigarette into the fire, as if it prevented him from assuming the passive state which the Professor had recommended.

As he sat there it came into his mind that the letter had been written under the stress of a great emotion, that the writer had perhaps been suffering from grief or anxiety, and that he had written hurriedly, perhaps giving little thought to coherency or legibility.

At this point Billy began to feel extremely sleepy. It was the warmth of the room — a dry, almost fierce heat. He wondered if Professor Scudamore ever opened the windows. The grate was rather a high one, and the coals were piled almost up to the chimney, and now they were nearly all red hot. There was a curious perfume in the room. When Billy first noticed it he began to analyze it in a stupid, sleepy way. He felt deliciously sleepy and indolent, as if he never wished to move again. He began to enjoy the languid heat and airlessness of the room, as he could remember enjoying splendid days of blistering sunshine in the tropics. The perfume, too, was delicious. But it was not European, it had none of the delicate suavity of more civilized scents. It was one of those strong and violent perfumes that one finds in the bazaars of Cairo, and in the *souks* of Tunis, and even in the little *boutiques* of Biskra — perfumes such as the Israelite women and the painted dancing girls saturate themselves with. And with it there was mingled a little scented smoke as of some Oriental incense. The heat, the incense, and that all-pervading perfume, produced a strangely somnolent effect upon Mowbray. And yet he knew that at no moment during that interview had he been really asleep. Always he had been conscious of that little strange figure in its wonderful Chinese robe sitting opposite to him

and watching him with glittering eyes behind the large-rimmed glasses.

But as he stared at the paper in his hand, his eyes fixed upon those weird hieroglyphical characters which he could not read, all sense of the present seemed to leave him, and he drifted into that state of passivity in which the mind is sometimes capable of receiving almost photographic impressions of things unseen by the eyes . . .

Billy was not unconscious nor was he asleep, but he had drifted away, until even to his own conscious seeming, he had left East Feddon altogether. And he found himself in a small, square room, very high, very white, very bare. There was scarcely any furniture in it. There was a scroll upon the walls forming a kind of frieze, high up and near the ceiling; the writing upon it was in pale gold, and the letters resembled those in the letter which he held in his hand. Across the window green wooden shutters were fastened, and through the chinks he could discern blinding and fierce sunshine that seemed to touch him like the breath of some hot furnace, and glimpses of a sky so blue that it hurt and distressed his eyes. On the floor, which was of some hard, white and cold substance — probably marble — there were two rugs, fine, delicate Persian rugs of indefinite but intricate pattern and beautiful subdued coloring. And there was a large chest of carved wood with painted oval panels upon it. That was all, except a long and wide divan upon which a man was sitting writing . . .

This man was distinctly visible to Billy. He wore a snowy turban on his head. Round his shoulders, fastened with a clasp of fine platinum set with large, lustrous diamonds, there was a burnous, finely woven of some thick and soft silken cloth, of a

rich dark blue. It was heavily embroidered with gold. But it was the man's face that arrested Billy. It was rather pale and not dark, for the eyes were gray and the beard straw-colored. The complexion was very little darker than that of many Europeans. It was worn and sad, and in its suggestion of sorrow there was also a suggestion of vindictive bitterness. It was the face of a man who has suffered perhaps some cruel wrong and whose whole heart is set upon revenge. He looked as if he were being slowly eaten up, devoured, by this obsession. His grief was great, he had endured a mortal wound, striking, perhaps, at the very roots of honor, and he wished to retaliate. The small and lofty room seemed in some curious way to be filled with this desperate, passionate desire for revenge; it was like a concrete, material thing, permeating it like a sinister atmosphere . . .

As Billy watched with drowsy, languid interest he became aware of a faint sound of music. And as he had known and recognized the Oriental character of the writing, and then of the perfume, so now he recognized the Oriental character of that faint but poignant music. It was so frail, so formless, as if a ghost had played upon a ghostly flute. It had no substance, no meaning, yet it was plaintive and almost fiercely monotonous and melancholy. Billy recognized it for the sound of a *gezbah* — the wooden flute of the Arabs — played with great skill, as an unlearned Arab shepherd will often play it. Its strange appealing wistfulness filled the room. It was thin, like the trickling of water, but it was sweet too, as if it had been made of some ethereal, cold distillation of honey-dew. It thrilled Billy. It was like a mystery that was trying to explain itself, to express its meaning. It was indefinite, prolonged, unvarying, like all Oriental

music, persistent, magical, possessing, too, a certain restless quality. And the man on the divan sat there writing, unmoved by the sound, perhaps indifferent to it. And then suddenly the mystery cleared, and Billy understood with a sudden violent illumination that this man was engaged in writing the letter which the Professor had put into his hand . . .

The music died away. A blur of mist blotted out the room with its high, white walls, its frieze of texts from the Koran. The figure upon the divan vanished. Professor Scudamore's voice sounded across the silence. The letter fell from Billy's hand, and, looking up, he saw the Professor still sitting opposite to him, gazing at him through the big spectacles with bright, penetrating, yet not unkindly eyes.

"A simple and very ordinary experiment in elementary psychometry," he said, in his dull, flat voice.

Billy got up and shook himself, as if he were not quite sure where he was. He thought that he should have felt exactly like that if he had just came round after being given chloroform. He gave a nervous little laugh.

"But how horrible!" he said; "how can you make me hear and see such things?"

"You saw very little," Scudamore reminded him.

"Very little?" repeated Billy, in an astonished tone.

"For instance, you do not yet know the contents of this letter," said the Professor, smiling; "you did not go beneath the surface."

"I begin to think I hate this kind of thing!" said Billy.

"You are allowing yourself to be influenced by the absurd pronouncements of Father Benedict. I tell you again the Church wishes to keep the monopoly of the supernatural in her own hands. You

would not have come at all to-night if it had not been that you are at the moment under a very strong and very subtle influence which is more powerful than this priest's!"

"It is not — not wholesome," protested Billy.

He had a very great longing to fling open the window and admit the fresh, cold, clean November air.

"Why did I see all that?" he asked almost fiercely.

He was rendered irritable by the success of the experiment, by this quick discovery of latent unknown power within himself.

"Was it your doing?" he said.

The Professor smiled.

"But you have not told me what you saw," he said.

"I saw the room and the man writing. I smelt the Oriental scent and I heard the flute," said Billy.

"So I imagined," said the Professor, "but I was not sure whether you would hear and smell as well as see. All your faculties were in play. For a beginning it was excellent!"

CHAPTER VII

IT was almost a relief to Billy when the door opened and Mrs. Blair came into the room, accompanied by Sir James Bett and Mrs. Silva, and a youngish woman dressed in a very plain black dress. She was Mrs. Silva's *soi-disant* maid, and was a sensitive.

"Mr. Mowbray," said the Professor tranquilly, "has made his first essay in psychometry."

Mrs. Silva regarded the young man with her immense black eyes.

"Did you have any results?" she asked.

"Mr. Mowbray is hardly ready yet to give us his impressions," said Professor Scudamore. "But I may say the experiment was quite wonderfully successful for a beginner."

Billy said nothing. He did not at all wish these people to know the details of his curious vision. He looked a little sulky and morose, like a schoolboy who has been taken to an entertainment that bores him. He felt very certain of one thing — that he did not wish to be present at the séance which was just going to be held.

Professor Scudamore rose, placed the medium in an armchair, and partially darkened the room by putting the Chinese screen before the fire. A very long and rather uncomfortable silence followed. The room was no longer quite so hot, though the fire blazed with an even greater fierceness. It was quite light enough to distinguish the faces of all those present. Mrs. Silva's face looked yellow and indolent and only slightly interested. Sir James looked like a sick bird of prey, his lean, thin face was passive and melancholy. Mrs. Blair seemed even more absent-minded than usual. The medium, who appeared now to be asleep, had a large, fat, white face, of a singularly expressionless character.

As Billy sat there in the little circle that had now been formed, he was suddenly conscious of a cold air, as of wind blowing across the snow-fields of mountain summits, touching him. He shivered, wondering if any one else had noticed it. But nothing in the room stirred at all. The thin, fine lace on Mrs. Blair's dress was quite motionless; so were some sheets of paper that lay on the writing-table.

Suddenly the medium began to speak . . .

She spoke very rapidly, in a language unknown

to Billy, and in a voice that was both harsh and guttural.

Mrs. Silva glanced at Sir.James, and shook her head slightly, shrugging her shoulders as if to indicate her own complete lack of comprehension. He remained interested and attentive. Mrs. Blair looked slightly bored. She liked to be amused, and to listen to the lengthy monologue in an unknown tongue did not amuse her.

"This control," said Sir James, speaking so suddenly that Billy quite jumped, "is an Oriental."

The Professor nodded and made a gesture that seemed to entreat silence. An eerie sensation came over Billy. He saw again the high, white, bare room, with the frieze of texts delineated in pale gold; he saw again the man sitting on the divan writing, his proud, hurt, revengeful face bent above the paper as he wrote . . .

Suddenly Billy felt compelled to speak.

"She is talking in Arabic," he said, "in the language of the letter."

The Professor nodded again. He looked more than half asleep. But sometimes, as if to show that he was awake, alert, and attentive, he addressed a sentence in Arabic to the medium, who continued with even greater volubility to pour forth streams of unintelligible sound.

Emotion, anger, revenge . . . Billy could read all these things into the speech, of which, however, he did not understand a single word. He understood only as he had understood when he had watched the Arab writing the letter.

Sometimes the voice was high and angry, sometimes it broke into a kind of sobbing protest; then it became low, vindictive, menacing.

"I wish," said Mrs. Blair a little impatiently, "that we could have an English control."

"It is impossible," said the Professor quickly, "this control has an extremely important message to deliver." He was now taking rapid notes in what looked rather like shorthand. But he scarcely seemed to look at his writing at all; his eyes were fixed upon the medium. "He has no message, however, for Sir James nor for Mrs. Silva. He approves of the presence of Mr. Mowbray, and wishes that Miss Winton could also be here. In fact, he refuses to reveal all that he has to say unless she can come!"

"But Pamela cannot speak Arabic," protested Mrs. Blair. "Why should he want Pamela?"

The medium appeared to answer this question in an abrupt, commanding, rather arrogant manner, even with some sign of impatience.

The Professor translated it immediately.

"He promises that an English-speaking control should come if Miss Winton were present!"

"Do you think Pamela would mind coming, Billy?" said Mrs. Blair. She added aside: "How fortunate that he does not insist upon having Father Benedict!"

"I'd rather Pamela didn't come," said Billy, in a tone of unusual decision.

"Well, I don't suppose we shall get another control to-night," said the Professor.

There was a long silence, in which it seemed as if the medium had fallen into a slumber too deep to be aroused. Billy looked round the room, and once more the ice-cold, artic air touched him. The fire-light painted warm, moving shadows on the walls; flickering shadows that looked almost alive. There was an exaggerated representation of the Professor flung haphazard upon the wall. And

against the plain and dark curtains that were drawn across the windows glowing lights moved to and fro. They did not flash out suddenly like sparks, but appeared and melted away gradually, as if a solid form had slowly become red-hot and then, as slowly, turned dark and cold again. The icy air blew more savagely through the room, yet it stirred nothing that was there. And Billy fancied that he could yet again hear the wistful fluting of those ghostly flutes . . .

The medium spoke again abruptly, angrily, in a voice almost suffocated with passion.

"I am sorry to say that he desires only the presence of Mr. Mowbray, Mrs. Blair and myself and Miss Winton," said the Professor.

Mrs. Silva rose immediately. "I'm not going to stay here all night listening to a long rigmarole in Arabic," she said. "I shall go to bed. Oh, Marcelle can stay as long as you like."

Then Sir James rose, and stood beside Mrs. Silva, who was yawning.

"Yes, I think under the circumstances we had better go. I understand something of what has been said. But it is not the Arabic I learned in Egypt, nor even what is spoken in Syria. It resembles much more the language one hears in the oases of the Sahara."

His learned, rather judicial voice sounded curiously unmoved.

"Of course if you can persuade Miss Winton to come the results might prove extremely interesting!"

"I don't want Pamela to come," repeated Billy Mowbray obstinately.

He was thinking more than ever of Father Benedict's warning. And he had a distinct impression that all the events of the evening had been leading

up to this one thing — the suggestion that Pamela should be present.

"What nonsense, Billy!" said Mrs. Blair. "I'll go and fetch her."

Before he could protest she had hurried out of the room. She was followed more slowly by Sir James Bett and Mrs. Silva. They walked slowly down the wide, heated corridor, while Mrs. Blair ran on ahead.

Sir James smiled, and his yellow face became oddly wrinkled.

"I'm really glad to be out of that, you know," he said to Mrs. Silva.

"Why?" she asked. "I didn't understand a word."

Sir James looked very old and shrunken and cold; he seemed to have dwindled.

"I was simply frozen in there," he said; "and those lights — I never saw so many before. Did you notice anything particular about them?"

"Only that they seemed less brilliant and luminous than usual," she answered.

"They were *blood-red!*" said Sir James violently.

Mrs. Silva shivered slightly. "I never care about a new control," she said. "Hector was always interesting."

"But so unreliable," said Sir James, who had lost his appointment through following the advice of Hector.

"He knew nothing about India, of course," she said; "but the advice he gave me about stocks and shares was always good."

"Did anything strike you at all strange about this one?" pursued Sir James.

They had reached the place where the corridor widened into a square gallery above the principal

hall. All was dark below, but the lights in the corridor cast flickering shadows upon the old portraits of men and women attired in the fantastic costumes of bygone days who watched from their dull gilt frames.

"Nothing particular," said Mrs. Silva. "I was only bored because I didn't understand a word."

She was longing to go to bed and wished that he would not detain her. She tried not to betray it, and added in a more pleasant way:

"Did it you?"

"Yes," he said, "he seemed to me extraordinarily violent. Not only tenacious and obstinate and determined to be heard — we are accustomed to that in a new control — but violent and vindictive! Almost"— and he hushed his voice —"as if he wished to enter into communication with us for the purpose of injuring some one!"

Mrs. Silva shuddered. Her nerves had not been very strong since she had taken up the practice of spiritualism.

"But surely in that case the Professor wouldn't have risked asking Miss Winton to come?"

"Didn't you notice? Billy Mowbray didn't want her to. And they will be three women to two men . . . supposing anything should happen?"

"Why what *could* happen?" she said nervously.

Sir James Bett's face was oddly set. "I understood something of what was said. There was a good deal about a ring. I gathered the impression of a *crime passionnel* — love, jealousy, murder . . ." He wrinkled his brow, and looked very like a tired, elderly bird. Then he added: "I daresay Billy was right in not wishing his cousin to come!"

"Oh, Billee — he's awfullee sillee about her!" She clipped her words as she always did when she

was very tired, and it was too much of an effort to her to speak in the slow and languid drawl she generally affected.

They said good night and repaired to their respective apartments.

In the meantime Billy was saying to Professor Scudamore:

"I hope my cousin has gone to bed. I hope she won't come!"

The Professor looked at him with bright, rather eager eyes.

"Why did *you* come?" he said.

"I suppose out of curiosity," said Billy hesitatingly.

"Oh, no — you had several motives, but that was not really one of them. Do not be offended. You have not been taught to examine yourself. That is precisely where people like Father Benedict are so clever. Your motives are very mixed, but the chief was that you are in love with Miss Winton. There is no other dominant passion in your life just now. Everything about you gravitates to that. And, as I told you to-day, if you wished you could still marry her. You spoke of honor, I remember. But to-night there was a change. Perhaps you loved her a little more. Perhaps you loved honor a little less. But you were not able quite so definitely to face life without her, a life in which she could have no part at all. So you came to me to learn exactly what I meant. There is still time for you to draw back, Mr. Mowbray."

The Professor delivered this long speech in a perfectly calm tone, as if he were relating some entirely impersonal matter. It was difficult to take offense. Yet as Billy listened he thought there was something exceedingly sinister about all that this man had just said to him. He felt as if the Professor

had been gazing tranquilly into his mind and reading it as if it had been an open book. It was true that he had begun to love Pamela with a deeper, more ardent, and more passionate love. It was true that the long months of separation had rendered him starving, and that to see her again had been somewhat overwhelming. It was true that Ralph's claim had grown a little pale. And, above all, it was quite true that his desire to step in and win Pamela at all costs was beginning to triumph slowly over all other considerations.

Even since the morning his love had undergone a subtle change; it had assumed a position of paramount importance in his life; it had become completely absorbing. . . .

"I suppose you are right," he admitted almost unwillingly.

The door opened and Mrs. Blair entered with Pamela. The girl wore a tea-gown of soft silk, colored like the paler petals of a pink rose. Her hair was simply knotted at the nape of her neck. Her throat and arms were bare. Over her shoulders she had flung rather hastily a long and very wide white ermine stole. She looked very beautiful — far more beautiful than she had done in her somber black dress earlier in the evening, although she was rather white and tired. She smiled at Billy as she came in.

The Professor looked at her in a welcoming manner.

"Miss Winton — you are yourself a medium of a very high order," he said, in his cold, imperturbable way.

"I don't want to see anything horrible, please," said Pamela; "I am very nervous, and as for being a medium, I don't think I am one at all."

"You are contemplating crossing the sea in a few weeks," said the Professor.

"Yes," said Pamela, "that isn't a secret at all."

"I advise you not to go," said Professor Scudamore.

"Oh, I'm afraid it is no use your doing that!" said the girl.

She sat down on the chair which Billy had placed for her next his own.

By this time the fire had rather died down, and no one had thought of renewing it. The Professor gathered his two shawls more closely about him. The medium fell into an apparently deep slumber. She was one of the rarer kind that can assume the trance condition at will without any extraneous aid. For a long time there was a deep silence . . .

Suddenly the ice-cold wind swept through the room; lights that were like solid balls of fire moved across the darkness; shadowy forms were faintly visible; beckoning hands appeared, half swathed in floating white drapery . . .

The medium spoke, still in the same harsh, guttural voice, and in a language that was strange to all present, with the exception of the Professor.

"We are not sitting as he wishes. Miss Winton is to sit between myself and Mrs. Blair."

Billy opened his mouth to protest, but he had no time to do so, for Pamela effected the change so quickly and apparently without thought.

Yet he wished that Pamela could have sat next to him. He felt that he could have protected her . . . in case anything should happen . . .

Happen? What could happen? He was simply feeling a little unnerved by his own extraordinary experience that night.

"I say there isn't any danger, is there?" he blurted out suddenly.

"Not the slightest," answered the Professor's voice very smoothly.

More than half an hour must have passed in complete silence. The control had ceased to speak ever since Pamela had changed her position. The wandering spirit lights glowed and then faded into darkness. The ice-cold air swept through the room, and yet nothing stirred. Even the soft, filmy draperies of Pamela's tea-gown were unmoved by it. It seemed, as before, to have no power at all to stir material objects. Yet to Billy the coldness was greater than it had ever been. The fire was almost out. Once a coal dropped and a tiny spurt of flame shot upwards. The Professor rose and poured something on it. There was a slight hissing sound and then it was completely extinguished. The room was now in total darkness.

Billy never knew what trickery nor what fraud was used that night by Professor Scudamore; he never knew what evil intelligences he had at his beck and call, but he never forgot the hour that followed — the strange communications of the medium, the fury with which they were uttered, the violent vehemence of those unintelligible pronouncements. The promise that an English-speaking control should come was not fulfilled. Fearful appearances passed before Billy's eyes in that hideous crepuscular darkness, illuminated only by those wandering balls of fire that glowed now crimson, now golden, and now blood-red. He wondered if Pamela could see them too, and, if so, why she was so obstinately silent. He tried to move and he could not; he felt himself paralyzed, powerless as one feels sometimes in a nightmare, incapable of stirring hand or foot.

Afterward he never knew quite what happened. He felt himself seized and flung violently across the room, just as if he had been a trivial obstacle to be thrown aside. He heard Pamela scream, and he caught sight of a dark face surmounted by a white

turban that gleamed luminously white. He saw, emerging from white sleeves, two long, thin and dusky hands — sinewy, strong hands. And he felt rather than saw that these two hands actually menaced Pamela. He hurled himself toward them, fighting them with both fists clenched. He pushed Pamela roughly away from their grasp. He felt a grip as of a steel trap upon his neck. And he fought — fought as a man fights for life and honor and the safety of those he loves — with every nerve, every muscle fiercely defiant. Then some one — Mrs. Blair, perhaps — switched on the electric light . . .

The room was in the utmost confusion. The Chinese screen lay broken on the floor. The table was overturned. Pamela lay half-fainting on the floor, cowering near the window, her eyes wide with terror. She was making a painful attempt to lift up her hands to ward off something that was evil as well as invisible and menacing. Marcelle lay in a profound and trance-like sleep; her fat white face looking singularly inert and expressionless. The Professor stood there, calm, controlled, a slight smile parting his thin lips. Mrs. Blair's figure could be seen through the open door, vanishing rapidly down the long corridor, as if terror were hastening her flight.

Billy's collar was lying like a limp rag upon the floor. His coat was torn. There was a little blood upon his face, which was very pale. He looked shaken, exhausted, not with fear, but from the effects of that fierce combat in which he had been engaged.

Across the silence he heard the Professor saying blandly: "A very violent control — one would almost think he wished to enter into communication with us for purposes of revenge!"

"What happened?" said Billy breathlessly. He ran across the room to where Pamela was cowering and crying. "Pamela — Pamela — you are not hurt!" he cried. The words sounded almost like a prayer. He raised her gently and drew her on to the sofa.

"Billy — Billy — don't let him touch me! Don't let him hurt me!"

"It's all right now, Pam," he whispered, "there's no one here. I'm taking care of you . . ."

She clung to his hand, crying pitifully.

"Oh, take me away! Take me to Mrs. Blair! I can't be left alone!"

Billy led her gently down the darkened corridor, holding her hand as if she had been a little frightened child. He knocked at the door of Mrs. Blair's room. She came at once to the door. Her teeth were chattering.

"You must let Pam sleep in your dressing-room. She can't be left alone!" said Billy firmly.

"I'd rather she slept on the sofa in here. I can make it quite comfortable. The maids have gone to bed."

"That will do beautifully," he said rather sternly. "You're responsible for her presence there to-night, and you mustn't leave her alone now."

"I couldn't help it," she murmured incoherently. She was obviously on the verge of hysterics. "If she hadn't come it would have meant we should have had nothing more to-night in the way of controls."

"Wouldn't that have been perhaps safer?" asked Billy dryly.

"I do hope Father Benedict didn't hear anything. I put him down at the end of the east wing on purpose," she said. "He would be so angry — especially after what he said at dinner."

"I'm more than ever convinced that he was quite right," said Billy. "Good night, Mrs. Blair. Take care of Pamela, please."

He went back to the Professor, who had restored the room to its usual neatness; there was no sign of confusion, and all was orderly and calm. Marcelle had gone.

Billy stood in front of him, looking strangely stern and reproachful.

"Well?" he said, "are you satisfied, Professor? What devil's work was this?"

The Professor looked as calm and unmoved as ever, but his face was a trifle paler than usual, and his eyes shone with a curious bright light.

"Father Benedict would, of course, attribute it all to the devil," he said quietly; "but my theory is quite a different one from his. I believe in the actual presence of departed spirits who desire, for certain reasons of their own, to return and communicate with us. Frequently they deplore that there are so many to whom this privilege is denied. Sometimes it does indeed seem, as it did to-night, that these spirits are evil — they are the spirits of evil persons. And it sometimes also happens, as it did to-night — for the third time only in all my very long experience — that the control is imbued with enormous physical strength — and is not only beyond our control, but is a danger to those present. Look at your neck, Mr. Mowbray."

He took out a pocket mirror, wiped it with his handkerchief, and held it up in front of Billy, who perceived that there were dark and livid marks, as of fingers, discoloring his throat.

"I don't understand. Why should he attack *me?*" said Billy, in a stupefied tone.

"I daresay you noticed that you were not his first objective?" remarked the Professor.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean — you defended Miss Winton, did you not?"

"I was thrown across the room first," said Billy.

"And then the control attacked her," said the Professor, smiling.

There was a brief pause.

"Who is it — what is it — this control?" said Billy fiercely.

"I have not made up my mind. I have, however, a theory about him which I may explain to you later on. But I can tell you this. You have been instrumental in saving Miss Winton from a very great danger. It is possible that you even saved her life." He paused and then added impressively: "*At the risk of your own.*"

Billy turned ashen-white.

"Is she quite safe now?" he said, his lips trembling.

"As far as I can tell. This is only my third experience, as I have just said, of a control beyond control. Good night." He held out his hand as if he wished to dismiss Billy.

But Billy did not move.

"You've got to tell me what happened in the other two instances, if you please, Professor," he said authoritatively.

"Oh, nothing happened of any importance on the other two occasions," said the Professor, so glibly that Billy felt convinced that he was lying. But he was not baffled.

"Did you ever see Ralph Mellish?" he asked.

"I have never met him."

"You don't know him at all?"

"I do not know him."

"Do you know anything about him?"

The Professor began to arrange some books that were lying on the table.

"I know people who know him," he said guardedly. "Why do you ask?"

"I had the feeling," said Billy, "that this business to-night was somehow connected with him. He lives, as perhaps you are aware, in North Africa, at a place called Djebl Anaba?"

"Ah! — the Hill of the Jujube Tree," said the Professor, quietly translating the Arab name.

"I wondered if the control — isn't that what you call it? — had been in life an enemy of Mellish's, and that was the reason why he attacked or tried to attack Miss Winton!"

"The same idea precisely occurred to me," said Professor Scudamore.

He uttered this commonplace sentence in such a manner that Billy felt an uncomfortable sensation of coldness and fear.

"You know something, Professor. Why won't you tell me?"

"You would not accept evidence arrived at by such means. If I, living in London, told you that I had witnessed events happening in North Africa, would you believe me?"

"I don't know that I should," said Billy frankly.

"Exactly," said Professor Scudamore.

"But why," said Billy, "did you want to drag me into it?"

"Because I had by chance learned the dominant motive of your life. You saw it — you knew it, and it was near to your hand — this treasure you prized. Yet for some foolish reason you were determined to reject it!"

It was true, of course, but, then, Billy was perfectly convinced that Pamela had never cared for him at all. And he was satisfied that she cared very deeply for Ralph Mellish.

"I suppose," he said, "that you won't admit that control again?"

"He will come when he wants to. I am sorry he came at East Feddon. Mrs. Blair used to wish only to communicate with her husband, but she has got beyond that stage now and prefers a new control. Sir James has a pet control called Hector who supplies him with some very curious if not very accurate details of Indian administration. Mrs. Silva wishes to speak to her only son, who passed over two or three years ago, but Hector is also rather a favorite of hers. They were all disappointed tonight. This masterful and violent control usurped command of the sensitive from the outset. Marcelle is a most uneducated and illiterate French girl of the peasant class. She is extremely sickly and delicate and does not know a single word of any language except her own."

"Do you mean to say," said Billy, "that you really believe a strange spirit was present?"

"What possible alternative theory could you suggest?" said the Professor.

"I suggest that you yourself hypnotized the medium!" said Billy boldly.

The Professor regarded him with bright, penetrating eyes.

"And my motive?" he said, smiling ambiguously.

"Oh, to arrive at information. Definite information . . . from persons surprised into confessing the truth!" He was surprised now at his own boldness.

"And for what purpose?"

"So that you might, if necessary, use that information," said Billy.

The Professor felt that a fierce antagonism and distrust lay behind these words. But it was not

the moment to quarrel with Billy, who, as Rupert's friend, had the situation pretty well in his own hands.

"Which of us could possibly know, for instance, what is passing at Djebl Anaba?" he inquired.

"But supposing Mellish had been present?"

"Only," said Professor Scudamore, "he wasn't present."

"You might have wished to arouse the suspicions of Miss Winton upon some matter concerning him," said Billy with an odd obstinacy.

"It would have been rather a violent way of achieving what could easily have been done by a simple statement," said the Professor.

"You are too clever for me," said Billy. "I'm no psychologist, and I cannot pretend to analyze your motives."

He looked at him distrustfully.

"And if you want to help me, I'd somehow rather you didn't," he said roughly.

"And supposing my object were rather to help Miss Winton?" said the Professor very coldly and steadily.

"I think I'd rather you didn't do that either," said Billy.

He felt a great wish to be violently rude and insulting to Professor Scudamore.

To-morrow — yes, certainly to-morrow — he would seek out Father Benedict and ask his advice.

CHAPTER VIII

FATHER BENEDICT had been an intimate, almost lifelong friend of Edmund Blair, and as has been seen, he was Rupert's guardian as well as his

spiritual director. This explained his frequent presence at East Feddon, although a certain constraint had arisen between himself and Mrs. Blair since the time when she had so abruptly changed her mind about becoming a Catholic. She had given no reason, and Father Benedict, grievously disappointed as he was, could hazard no conjecture upon the subject. He had believed that the Church would have given an immense consolation and support to one so broken-hearted as Mrs. Blair had been at the time of her husband's rather sudden death.

Father Benedict had urged her kindly, but nevertheless vehemently, to reconsider her decision. He reminded her that she was definitely refusing and rejecting the grace offered to her. And then he became suddenly aware that she no longer required consolation. Something, or perhaps some one, had intervened to comfort her. He could not imagine its nature. Only a few weeks had passed since her bereavement, and he could not bring himself to believe, as many did, that she was already contemplating a second marriage. The truth, which she had so successfully hidden from him, was this. She had fallen into the hands of earnest and ardent spiritualists; she had received what purported to be messages of love from her dead husband; she had seen his face, as she believed, materialized in a little dark upper room of an obscure London street. And, further, she had heard what she firmly believed to have been his voice, entreating her not to become a Catholic, and declaring that his hope of ultimate happiness and salvation depended upon her remaining outside the Church. Since *passing over,* he assured her that he had learned the falseness of creeds and the uselessness of dogma. It was from that moment that Mrs. Blair had ceased to prepare for her reception into the Church.

Instead of being sympathetic with Catholicism in a tolerant, indifferent way, she had now become very violently opposed to it. She disliked intensely meeting Catholics. She felt that in their eyes she was that contemptible soul that sets out to build a tower without ascertaining whether he will be able to finish it. She had a feeling, an unquiet, half-superstitious feeling, that she had been found wanting. Theologians would have said simply that she had not corresponded to the grace offered to her. She had had the light, of that there was no doubt at all, and she had refused to emerge from darkness. The kindly plea of "invincible ignorance" could never be hers. For those few weeks after Edmund Blair's death she had been very much in earnest, and entirely resolved to follow that straight and narrow way at once so easy and so hard. But in this realized failure of hers she remained always quite obstinate. Under other circumstances she would have been perhaps better able to forget the past a little, to put it out of sight. But the very presence of her stepson kept her, as it were, in perpetual remembrance of her own backsliding. Yet the boy had never mentioned it. He was a very good boy; he had been carefully trained, and he was extremely devoted to his religion. It would perhaps have been easier for her if he had been careless and negligent.

Mrs. Blair was clever enough to hide her antagonism both from Father Benedict and Rupert. She could not refuse to receive the priest, as she would have done had the house been her own. But the house belonged to Rupert and he could do exactly as he pleased there. He was always courteous and consulted her, but once she had tried to dissuade him from inviting Father Benedict on a particular occasion, and afterward she had noticed

that Rupert never again consulted her on the subject. He simply told her that Father Benedict was coming, and every time this happened it seemed to stab her. It was as if he felt that on this point she had lost the right to be consulted, and once or twice she had come near to disliking Rupert on account of his obstinate persistence in asking the priest to visit East Feddon whenever he went there himself. She felt that he was very powerfully influenced by Father Benedict, and that her own influence counted for nothing.

For the last four years Mrs. Blair had successfully hidden the fact of her spiritualistic practices from Father Benedict. Both he and Rupert were in absolute ignorance of those séances that took place at East Feddon and they were also completely ignorant of Professor Scudamore's real profession. But the priest, nevertheless, felt extremely anxious about her. She never permitted him now to speak of religion at all, and if the subject was ever mentioned in her presence she betrayed a nervous and restless discomfiture. In her husband's lifetime she had almost always attended Mass whenever a priest had stayed at East Feddon. Now she never entered the chapel at all and had ceased to go to any church.

Mrs. Blair had naturally been averse to the idea that Professor Scudamore and Father Benedict should meet under her roof. But it had been practically unavoidable, since the Professor was on the point of arriving when Rupert's telegram had come, and Sir James Bett was already in the house to assist at the séance. On the other hand, Lady Saltmarshe had eagerly announced her wish to meet the celebrated preacher. Mrs. Blair knew the Saltmarshes but slightly, they were friends of Rupert's, and she was anxious to make their visit pass pleas-

antly. She had therefore, with many fears and scruples, permitted this ill-assorted party to assemble under her roof. The initiated and the uninitiated fell into their appointed groups. She had not been at all anxious that Billy should be present at the séance. He was Rupert's friend, and though no doubt he would hold his tongue if strict secrecy were enjoined upon him, there was always a certain risk about admitting a newcomer. Pamela would naturally remain outside the spiritualistic circle with the Saltmarshes and Rupert.

Professor Scudamore had, however, not wished that Billy should remain outside. Mrs. Blair did not know what bait he had used to catch his fish; she only knew that Billy had been caught. And it was more than ever unfortunate that just tonight, in the presence of these two tyros, there should have been such an alarming disturbance. Mrs. Blair had never seen anything of the kind before, and for the moment she had lost her head, and shown even less presence of mind than Pamela. She had thought for one dreadful moment that Something was going to murder Someone. She had fled from the room as fast as ever she could, caring little whether she encountered Father Benedict or not. All her caution had been flung to the winds. And when Billy had brought Pamela, trembling and weeping, to her, she had been even more shocked by his appearance than by the girl's. She had noticed the torn coat, the absence of his collar, the bruises on his neck that were like the marks of fiercely gripping fingers. She had not believed that such things could really happen, though once or twice the Professor had undoubtedly hinted at their possibility. She had, so far, only experienced the usual phenomena familiar to all spiritualists, the wandering lights, so vague and yet so luminous; the

levitation of chairs and tables and sometimes of the medium; the sudden automatic movement of inanimate objects, the occasional materialization, the consolatory message. All these things were sufficiently familiar to her. And whereas she had owed her first joy in the practice to the *soi-disant* appearance of her late husband, she was now completely obsessed by the extraordinary excitement provided in the advent of new controls. She no longer desired consolation, but she craved for the excitement and amusement thus afforded.

She had been a little disturbed as well as astonished by the attitude of Father Benedict toward such practices. His sternly condemnatory speech had made her feel not a little uncomfortable. She almost felt as if he must have discovered something of the real motive for that sudden breaking away of hers four years ago. At the time she had been most careful not to say or do anything which should arouse his suspicions. It was a very common thing for people to go up to a certain point in the matter of instruction and then break away altogether. In her case there did not seem to have been any particular motive for this desertion, except that she had suddenly and independently emerged from the clutches of a great grief, and had become resigned and even cheerful. Father Benedict had concluded that some human influence had been at work, but he respected her evident desire for reticence, and, after the first, he did not question her. He was sorry and disappointed that she had not persevered and he had done what he could to persuade her to reconsider the question. But neither then nor at any other time had she given the slightest sign of doing so. He was especially sorry for Rupert's sake. He did not want the boy to grow up wholly apart from Catholic influence in his own home.

He had felt a little anxious about him when Edmund Blair died. He was at a critical age, and he had lost the immense benefit of his father's constant guidance. Edmund Blair had been a very wise and singularly devout man, and he trained his only son very carefully. The two were strangely devoted to each other. Father Benedict hoped that Rupert would never forget the lessons he had learned from his father.

Mrs. Blair was immensely preoccupied on the Saturday morning — the day following the séance. She rose rather later than usual, and after breakfasting in her own room she did not go downstairs. Her own sitting-room was upstairs, and she went thither — to write letters, as she said. But she did not attempt to write. She stood for a long time quite irresolutely by the window. It was raining, and that meant that no one would go out and play golf; they would all sit and talk and perhaps play bridge. Probably Rupert and Billy and Lord Saltmarshe had already gone out shooting, but owing to the bad weather they would certainly return early. She did not feel at all happy about Billy. She almost wished she had had a word with him before he went out. She wanted to warn him again not to mention anything of last night's happenings to Rupert and Father Benedict. As she stood there, looking at the rain and at the damp and sodden condition of the garden, she heard a light tap on the door.

"Come in!" she said.

The door opened and Billy Mowbray came into the room.

"Good morning, Mrs. Blair," he said.

"Good morning, Billy. I thought you had gone out shooting. Did the weather frighten you?"

She tried to speak carelessly.

"Oh, no, the weather didn't frighten me," said Billy imperturbably; "I came to say good-by. I'm going away to-day."

"Oh, I thought you would stay till Tuesday, at least," she said.

"I'm afraid, under the circumstances, it is impossible," he answered.

This sudden decision aroused her suspicions. But she did not feel inclined to ask any questions. She sat there idly drumming on the writing-table with a silver paper-knife.

"Do sit down, Billy," she said, at last.

But he stood there without moving. His face was set like a flint.

There was silence. Mrs. Blair both looked and felt ill at ease. She wondered very much if he had said anything to Rupert.

Professor Scudamore asked me to make his apologies to you," said Billy; "he has also been obliged to go."

"Do you mean that he has gone?" she asked sharply.

"Father Benedict told him to go," said Billy, "at the suggestion of Rupert."

Although Billy looked such a boy, there was something in his stern and condemnatory attitude which made her feel small and very insignificant.

"Father Benedict has no right whatever to send any guest of mine away!" she said with passionate anger.

"As Rupert's guardian, I suppose he can do pretty much as he likes at East Feddon," said Billy.

She faced him with flushed cheeks and angry, flaming eyes.

"What have you been saying?" she said.

"I have something to tell you, Mrs. Blair," he answered, "and then I must say good-by. I won't encroach upon your time."

"Well, do be quick," she said, exactly as if she were speaking to a child.

"I have told Rupert and Father Benedict exactly what happened here last night," he said. "I — I was sorry to have to do so. But I felt that it was my duty. Such things ought not to be allowed to continue in a house like East Feddon. A house where there is a chapel . . . and a priest . . . and things like that."

"Oh, yes — I can imagine what they would say!" she said contemptuously. "But you have been very deceitful and dishonorable. I thought you had pledged your word to Professor Scudamore not to mention anything at all about it."

"I did not pledge my word. I think he relied upon my becoming a — a disciple," said Billy; "I might have done so if things had turned out a little differently. As it was, I felt that I ought to tell Rupert."

Her face grew very hard. It had, too, a mulish expression; she could be, when she chose, exceedingly obstinate. But the situation in its new development frightened her. She thought of the enormous power Rupert possessed to hurt her. What would he do? What would Father Benedict — archenemy of spiritualists — make him do?

"It seems to me," she said, with an attempt to speak lightly, "that my party is breaking up. Pamela and the Saltmarshes will stay, I imagine, until the end of their invitation. I am afraid it will be rather dull and stupid for them. As for Sir James Bett and Mrs. Silva —"

"I meant to tell you that they went away this morning — with Professor Scudamore," said Billy.

Mrs. Blair turned rather white. She had not expected such rapid and drastic consequences.

"Did Father Benedict send them away, too?" she asked ironically.

"I think they went of their own accord. They realized their presence was, under the circumstances, a little anomalous."

"It will be hideously dull for those who are ieft," she said.

"But it won't be dangerous," said Billy, with a satirical smile. As he said these words, he looked at her for a moment very hard.

"It seems to me you're all very easily alarmed," she said.

"You were frightened yourself last night," he reminded her.

"Pamela's screaming like that made me nervous," she said; "I had no idea she was so hysterical."

"You were frightened before Pamela screamed," he said in his cold and steady voice.

Mrs. Blair rose with a gesture of impatience.

"I believe I must ask you to leave me alone for half an hour," she said with decision. "I have a quantity of letters to write, and several — several people are waiting to see me."

"Oh, but I must say good-by," said Billy. "The motor will be round in a moment."

"Good-by," she said coldly. "I suppose you know you've made a lot of mischief?" Her eyes flashed. "You had no business to speak to Rupert."

Billy looked straight at her.

"I showed him my throat," he said.

When he had gone, she sat down at her writing-table and took out some sheets of note-paper. "What a hateful young man that is," she said aloud.

She took up her pen, examined it, wiped it, dipped it in the ink. But she did not write. Her thoughts were full of Rupert — of East Feddon. She had always adored the place, and now in all probability she would not be allowed to remain there any longer. She felt a little cold at the prospect. Yes, they were sure to send her away. Father Benedict was evidently very angry and he would use his authority as Rupert's guardian. Father Benedict had already behaved with a high hand in thus summarily getting rid of the Professor. It was all hateful, and there was no doubt that Billy had behaved abominably in relating the episode of last night to Rupert. Tears of anger gathered in her eyes. Her party had been completely spoiled.

There was another knock at the door, and in reply to her irritably uttered "Come in," Pamela Winton entered the room.

Mrs. Blair had dreaded the meeting with Pamela. The girl had gone back to her own room quite early in the morning before Mrs. Blair was awake. For the moment she felt that she could hardly look her in the face. When she did so, it was a relief to find how calm and composed she looked.

"Have you come to say you are going away, too?" she said brightly.

Pamela did not smile. The brightness was too obviously artificial and forced.

"I am sorry," she said, "but I'm afraid that is why I have come. I don't feel as if I could stay another night in this house, Mrs. Blair."

"I daresay Billy will be delighted to have you traveling by the same train," said Mrs. Blair, not without malice.

"I do not wish to go by the same train," said Pamela listlessly.

"I'm very sorry, but I can't possibly send the

motor in more than once," she said. "You see, it's all been so unexpected — every one rushing off like this! And Rupert is sure to want his own car."

"I've sent for a cab, thank you, Mrs. Blair," said Pamela; "I think it is there now. They have just fetched my luggage. Good-by." She held out her hand. "Thank you for asking me to come. I am afraid it is time to start. . . ."

Mrs. Blair's face was singularly mulish. "Oh, for goodness' sake, don't apologize," she said irritably. "I'd really rather every one went. It was stupid having Rupert and Father Benedict coming down so unexpectedly. And I suppose it was stupid of me to ask you and Billy at the same time!" There was a touch of insolence in her voice.

Pamela did not answer. Her face was grave and pale and quite unmoved.

"But I should like to tell you how sorry I am you came in last night. It was all the Professor's fault. Girls are always nervous and hysterical. . . ."

Still Pamela was silent.

"Well, good-by," said Mrs. Blair. "Give my love to your mother. I hope you won't have a very cold journey."

"Good-by," said Pamela.

CHAPTER IX

PAMELA had not long been gone when, for the third time, a knock sounded at the door and interrupted Mrs. Blair. She rose with a gesture of impatience and flung it open. Rupert was standing there.

"May I come in?" he said.

"Yes — come in," she answered irritably. "I've had nothing but interruptions this morning!"

Rupert Blair was a very handsome boy, tall and strong and well-set-up, with fair, curly hair and blue eyes, and a very sweet expression. He was rather grave and quiet for his years. Catholic training has frequently this effect upon serious minds; it produces an early maturity, a precociously detached outlook upon the graver aspects of life. This is perhaps the result of a training almost always undertaken by religious bodies. It may safely be said that no man can pass through that training without keeping some permanent mark of it upon his soul. As Rupert grew older his stepmother recognized this. He was absolutely reliable. She had often wondered why he should have chosen for his most intimate friend Billy Mowbray, who was not a Catholic but a Protestant. He and Billy had been very close friends for many years. Had Rupert been capable of being influenced, Mrs. Blair felt certain that Father Benedict would long ago have put a stop to this intimacy. That he permitted it to continue was a sign that he did not fear any danger to Rupert's faith from this friendship with Billy.

Yes, that was what Father Benedict was there to guard — the faith of Rupert, that pearl of great price which she herself had deliberately rejected.

She was conscious of a certain constraint in Rupert's manner this morning. She was quite sure that he had come with a disagreeable message to deliver. No doubt he and Father Benedict had been judging her case, had been considering their verdict, and were prepared now to pass sentence upon her.

Father Benedict knew now that she had lied to him last night upon the subject of Professor Scudamore. Every answer she had given him had been simply a prevarication. She had resorted to sub-

terfuge, and it had been of no avail, since Billy had betrayed her.

A sudden rage against Billy possessed her. Why should he have turned against her in this way? She said abruptly:

"I've seen Billy. There is no need for you to say anything. Why are you not out shooting?"

"I came back on account of the weather," said Rupert; "and besides ——"

"Besides ——?" she repeated sharply.

"This — this can't go on, you know," he said, flushing.

"If only your friends wouldn't spy ——" she began.

"Billy didn't spy. Professor Scudamore sought him out — invited him to be present — made a point of his being there."

"We thought, of course, we could trust him."

"*I* can trust him!" said Rupert very steadily.

"Well," she said, "I suppose you and Father Benedict won't let things rest there. I'm in your hands."

She flung the words at him defiantly; there was a queer, angry look in her eyes.

Rupert seemed to discern in her then a lack of self-control, an impaired dignity. It was as if some subtle debasing process had begun to take effect in her. This nervous defiance and want of control seemed to suggest a very distinct deterioration in her character. That she could plot and lie to achieve secrecy in the matter of the séances had horrified him. She had always been a very frank and truthful woman. Now that the scales were lifted from his eyes he noticed innumerable changes in her. Yet for four years she had, perhaps, been engaged in these practices, and he had never had the slightest knowledge of it. She had kept her

secret well, just as some drug-users will keep their practice a secret.

"Yes," he said. "I'm most awfully sorry — but you won't be able to stay here."

Her heart sank. She had tried to believe that Rupert would urge Father Benedict not to be harsh, too hard. She had always been kind and indulgent to her stepson ever since she had come as a bride to East Feddon; she had striven anxiously to win his affections when he was still quite a little child. Surely this would count for something now. . . .

No; for the last four years they had been drifting slowly apart. She had lost what little influence she had had over the boy. As he had been ruled and guided by his father, so, since Edmund's death, he had submitted voluntarily to being ruled and guided by Father Benedict.

She had expected this sentence; she had not thought that Father Benedict would temper justice with any mercy, but she felt that she was to be punished too cruelly. She did not speak, but the tears rushed to her eyes.

"I suppose this has been going on ever since my father died?" said Rupert.

"Almost — ever since!"

"And it was the main reason for your renouncing your intention of becoming a Catholic?"

"It was on account of your father's very first message to me. He warned me of the terrible results of my taking such a step, both in this world and the next. Temporal misfortune here — eternal misery hereafter. He said, too, that his eternal salvation could only be purchased by my avoidance of Catholicism." As she spoke something of her old self-command returned. She held her head erect; she looked like a prophetess of evil.

"And didn't you see that such a message could never, never have come from my father — holy saint that he was? Didn't you recognize that such words must have come straight from the devil?" He looked at her pityingly. "Mother . . ." he said with entreaty in his voice.

Of late years he had not often addressed her thus. The word touched her in spite of herself; but she held her ground.

"Since then I have never believed a single word of the Catholic religion!" she said. "Yes — you can turn me out if you like, Rupert — you and that man between you. But you won't make me change!"

"We don't want to be hard on you," said Rupert quietly; "I'll do all I can in the way of money. But you must see I can't let things like this happen at East Feddon. Why, the sanctuary lamp has been burning here for over five hundred years, except for one short break when the estate was in Protestant hands. We can't have things happening such as happened here last night. Billy said that up to a certain point he believed in the theory of suggestion — he believed that Scudamore had hypnotized the medium, made her talk Arabic and the rest. But afterward he said that theory wouldn't hold — he believed that active and violent forces of evil were set loose, here at East Feddon." His fair face flamed with anger and shame. "You have brought evil intelligences into the house — deliberately, wantonly — here, where my father spent so many years in prayer and recollection. It was a holy house — dedicated to the Faith — to the service of God — and you have poisoned it, you and Scudamore and those arch-enemies of Catholicism, Sir James Bett and Mrs. Silva!"

He spoke in a tone of passionate reproach.

"That is why you can't stay here. You have forfeited all right you had to guard anything that once belonged to my father!"

Mrs. Blair leaned back in her seat as if she had been dealt a blow. She turned her face from Rupert; she was ashamed that he should see her tears.

"Don't — don't send me away, Rupert ——" she said brokenly.

"Will you see Father Benedict? Will you hear what he has to say?"

"I don't want to see him," she answered stubbornly.

"If you would only listen to him — he can tell you better than I can the dangers to which you are exposing yourself, the risks you are running. He is downstairs, waiting for me to fetch him."

He went out of the room and returned presently, accompanied by the priest.

It seemed to Rupert that the very sight of Father Benedict aroused his stepmother's fury. He had scarcely crossed the threshold when she burst forth passionately:

"When my husband appointed you guardian of his son, he never intended that you should use your authority to turn me out of his house!"

Father Benedict advanced into the room. He was looking very old this morning, worn and tired and rather sad. Billy's narrative had alarmed and horrified him, but it explained much that had always been very mysterious to him about Mrs. Blair, and it had lifted the veil in such a manner as to make a complete revelation of the influences that had of late years dominated her.

"The house is Rupert's," he said. "After your husband's death you no longer had any right to live here. But we preferred that you should do so.

And now it is better for East Feddon that you should go away. You have forfeited all right to remain. You have introduced things which can not be permitted." There was something inexorable about his manner. "You ought never to have had this man Scudamore in the house. He is, I believe, the same man who a few years ago was charged with fraud in connection with other spiritualists. Since then he has changed his name, for although the case fell through he was under suspicion. I may as well tell you now, Mrs. Blair, that Rupert and I have often wondered how you contrived to spend such very large sums living here so quietly. Indeed, once or twice lately you have suggested that your allowance was insufficient for the unkeep of the place. Last summer Rupert told me you had asked for an additional sum for some repairs in connection with the North Farm. Since then the new tenants have written to Rupert telling him that these repairs were inadequately carried out. I am sorry, but all these matters will have to be gone into."

Mrs. Blair flushed. She was aware that since the demands of Scudamore had become more and more importunate she had but negligently attended to her stewardship. The agent, a young and inexperienced man, was not in a position to remonstrate. Rupert was seldom at home, and he had also been completely absent for a whole year in India, when he first joined his regiment.

"And now I am going to give you a few words of warning," said Father Benedict. "I do not know if you are acquainted with the theory, now very commonly advanced, that to each person has been allotted by the powers of evil an attendant wicked spirit, known as the Watcher at the Gate, who is ever on the alert to enter into communica-

tion with that soul for the purpose of its ultimate destruction. I need hardly tell you that the spiritist is deliberately courting the approach of that evil spirit who is waiting to enter in and take possession."

Her face assumed the stubborn, almost mulish expression.

"I have heard that ridiculous nonsense," she said, "and I do not believe a word of it. I have never had any communications with evil spirits. I have spoken to my husband, and I have received messages from him. I have spoken to many of his friends. They were all good people when they lived on earth."

"And was that a good spirit who attacked Miss Winton and Mr. Mowbray last night?" inquired the priest.

"Billy exaggerated a very trivial incident — he made a great fuss about nothing. And Pamela is very hysterical."

"You wouldn't say that if you had seen Mr. Mowbray's throat," said Father Benedict.

She was silent.

"The Church," he continued slowly, "has always prohibited all magic practices, all intercourse or dabbling with the occult, the unseen. And on the therapeutic side there must always be considered the enormous evidence set forward by the statistics of insanity — the innumerable inmates of asylums who were perfectly sane and normal men and women before they yielded themselves to spiritualistic practices. And I am told that these spirits of evil display the utmost cunning in their methods; they pose almost invariably as good and pure and angelic beings. It is known that they speak in the very words of those we have lost through death, in order to compel our belief that they are the spir-

its of the departed instead of being lost and fallen angels. To Catholics they proclaim themselves Catholics, frequently attaching to themselves well-known names of devout and holy people. It is not easy for them to win a practising Catholic, yet with these they have been known to use an extreme subtlety, speaking the very language of the saints. I know that even good people have approached spiritualism through a desire to communicate with some one beloved and departed. Others have approached it more idly, from curiosity, to dip into the future and learn its secrets, or from the desire to experience the peculiar excitement attached to such practices. I have never known an instance," he continued, " where the character has not rapidly deteriorated, and where the victim has not become a prey to self-deceit, unable to discern truth from falsehood, untrustworthy, unreliable in the common things of daily life, and often depraved. The downward progress is so inevitable that the ultimate destruction of that soul seems an assured thing. And among all apostates," he concluded, " those who seem the most determined and obdurate and most definitely lost to the Church are to be found among the ranks of the spiritists. They have given themselves over freely and entirely to the enemy. They flatter themselves with a false security. They pretend to know secrets of the future life of which the Church is ignorant. It is almost always useless to try to redeem them from those forlorn legions of the lost."

When he had finished speaking there was a long pause. Rupert even hoped that those earnest and passionate words might have made some impression upon his stepmother. Her face had become more composed; her anger seemed to have died down. But she did not appear to be listening very

attentively to the priest's speech. She was thinking of East Feddon, and her thoughts were bitterly preoccupied with the prospect of leaving it. It had been her home for more than fourteen years. It held almost the whole of the associations and memories of her happy married life. She could remember as if it had been yesterday the brightness of the June day when Edmund had brought her thither as his bride. She could see so distinctly the little Rupert running about the garden, a small, eager, and active figure. Her attachment to her home was very great; she looked upon it as the most beautiful place in the world. She wondered where she should go, supposing Father Benedict fulfilled his threat and sent her away. It would be Rupert's doing, of course, but he would never have performed such an action on his own responsibility. Father Benedict was her enemy, a hard, inexorable foe. She wondered how she could ever have liked him, ever listened to him. She had been for a little while profoundly under his influence. Not without a struggle had she freed herself from that influence. He had taught her all that was beautiful in the Catholic Church, all that was difficult, all that was hard, and all that was holy. She had not quite forgotten those lessons, though she had tried to forget them.

She would probably go to London. She would have at least the advantages of freedom and independence. But she would never be able to afford the thrilling excitement of obtaining the assistance of Professor Scudamore. Even here she had scarcely been able to afford his extortionate fees. She would no longer be a leader in the spiritualistic world, flattered by its *habitués*, consulted by such persons as Sir James Bett and Mrs. Silva. She

would sink to quite a humble position. She would lose her exalted rank — she, who had been a priestess! She was sure that Rupert would not treat her as generously in the matter of money now as he had done in the past. Most of the money went with the estate, and her own jointure was by no means a large one.

"If you will sign a paper promising upon your honor never to indulge in these practices again," said Father Benedict, "you will be allowed to remain here. On no other condition."

She looked from one to the other. Both faces — the young and the old — were set and stern; even Rupert's betrayed no sign of softening.

"I absolutely decline to sign anything of the sort!" she said. "And how do you think it will look in the eyes of the world when people come to know that Rupert has turned me out of East Feddon?"

"His Catholic friends will agree that he had no other course open to him," said Father Benedict. "It is outrageous that you should have had these séances under this roof. The existence of the chapel should have been sufficient to deter you. It was not as if you were ignorant of the holy mysteries of our Faith. You had been thoroughly instructed, and yet you dared to bring these evil, unscrupulous people into the house. You guarded your secret very closely — no one had the smallest suspicion of what you were doing. You might have made a new disciple of Mr. Mowbray, had he not been thoroughly alarmed and disgusted by what happened here last night."

"I tell you that all my spirits are good ones!" she said angrily. "But they have often told me that the Catholic Church is their greatest enemy."

"No doubt she is," said the priest dryly; "but did not that warn you as to the nature of these spirits?"

He looked at her wistfully. She was the widow of one of his dearest friends. And once she had been so near to making her submission to the Church; she had so nearly participated in the grace that had been so abundantly offered to her. . . .

He rose from his seat.

"Are you both going away, too, to-day?" she asked.

"Oh, no," said Rupert. "I have leave until Tuesday. And Father Benedict will not go till then, either. Do you think you will be able to get ready by Tuesday?" He looked straight at his step-mother as he spoke, with steady, hard young eyes.

"You do not mean that I am to go at once — that I am to go on Tuesday, Rupert?" she cried, and her voice was suddenly shrill and piercing.

Rupert was aghast at the change in her which had become all at once so terribly apparent. She had been always a gentle, rather absent-minded woman, full of kindly impulses, especially solicitous for Rupert's happiness and comfort. Her character had wholly changed. She was obstinate, proud, and ambitious. She loved power. She had been praised and flattered, and now to be condemned and punished made her savagely angry.

Her very voice was uncontrolled and hysterical. She looked no longer perfectly balanced and normal.

"Never to come back? Is that what you mean, Rupert?" She seized his arm, and he felt that she wished to do him some personal violence and was only restrained by the presence of the priest. "Is that what you mean, Rupert?" she repeated.

Her grip on his arm was fierce; he tried to free himself from her clutch.

"Yes," he said quietly; "it is quite impossible under the circumstances to allow you to remain here a day longer than Tuesday. You refuse to agree to our conditions and there is no other alternative."

As he spoke he took her quietly by the wrist and made another attempt to release himself from her iron clutch.

"Don't make a scene, please," he said. "Let me go!"

He met her eyes, they were terrible — fierce, angry eyes. Her face was slightly contorted.

Suddenly her hand dropped to her side; she turned away her face and he could hear a sound as of passionate sobbing. He moved toward the door and Father Benedict followed him. They went into the passage, closing the door softly. Then from the room they had just left they heard a horrible sound — peal after peal of wild and shrill laughter followed by another outburst of that tempestuous and desolate sobbing. . . .

Father Benedict turned to Rupert.

"The Watcher at the Gate . . ." he said. "The Watcher at the Gate. . . ."

CHAPTER X

PAMELA traveled up to London alone, except for the presence of Célestine. There was no one else in the compartment. It was very cold, and in spite of the foot-warmer which Célestine — always a competent and thoughtful person — had procured for her, she felt miserably chilly. The bleak land-

scape through which the train passed was rendered the more depressing by the rain which continued to fall ceaselessly. As they neared London the train passed through the gray and sterile fields and dark, inferno-like tunnels which immediately approach the East End. On one side the masts and rigging of ships could be seen faintly indicated against the sky above the closely clustering roofs and chimneys. The little narrow streets huddled together had a sordid and squalid appearance. Pamela could see dirty little children playing in the gutter, and dipping their hands into the grimy puddles. They seemed heedless of the rain. Some of them were barefooted.

When the train stopped she got out rather stiffly. Célestine followed with her bag, and then darted away in pursuit of a porter and the luggage. Pamela looked about and saw the motor awaiting her. A footman hurried up to take her bag. She had telegraphed from Norwich to say that she was returning home, and she wondered idly what explanation Célestine would give to the other servants in regard to this sudden change of plans. She had only been gone two days, and she felt already as if half a lifetime had passed since she left home. Her thoughts were still confused, and she was very tired. She had hardly slept at all. She had dreaded the prospect of her interview with Mrs. Blair. Yet she had felt quite positive about one thing, and that was her fixed determination not to spend another night under her roof. She had been thoroughly frightened, and she recognized that in her terror there was a certain eerie and sinister quality. She had been in contact with things that admitted of no human explanation, and she felt as if their power was still in some measure being exercised over her.

The stir and bustle and the noise of the great terminus brought her mind back to a saner level. Every one seemed to be in a desperate hurry, as if their very lives depended upon getting away from the station as fast as possible. Some people were obviously nervous, whether for themselves or their possessions it would be difficult to say. Pamela stood quite still near the motor, watching them. And as she stood there she saw Billy advancing toward her.

She had only seen him at breakfast that morning, and then they had scarcely spoken to each other. He had not said that he was leaving by this train, and she wondered why he had not told her. He was smiling and looked boyishly eager. The cold air had rather nipped his healthy fair face, and he looked almost absurdly young.

She disliked to feel that he had avoided her on the journey to town, and she knew that she would have welcomed the opportunity of talking the matter over with him. She felt that he could have said something to calm her, to soothe her nerves. But perhaps he had not wished to discuss things with her, and so had purposely avoided traveling with her.

She made a step toward him with outstretched hand and parted lips, as if she were just going to speak, when another figure suddenly intervened, approaching her rapidly.

It was Ralph Mellish. . . .

Ralph came forward and his face wore a grim and rather saturnine smile. It was the second time he had felt a warning stab of jealousy, and on both occasions it had been provoked by that absurd young Mowbray, whom he felt quite unable to take seriously.

"Well, Pamela," he said, "I am sure you must be dying to know why I am in England, and how I contrived to come here to meet you, but all that kind of thing will keep." He took her hand, and looked at her with his piercing dark eyes.

"Ralph . . ." she said. Then she realized that she was trembling from head to foot, and she was unable to determine whether it was from joy or fear.

But she knew then that it would not be difficult for Ralph to make her actively afraid of him.

She saw the two men who loved her side by side, and, as it were, in juxtaposition to each other. She contrasted them in a swift mental survey — this man whom she had promised to marry, and the one she had refused to marry. The one was to her like some strange, impenetrable, almost undiscovered country, full of a powerful fascination, inspiring her at once with fear and love. The other was open and frank and perfectly simple; the kind of healthy, intelligent young Englishman who exists by the thousand. It was the first time that Pamela had ever even to herself admitted that there could be any possibility of her having made a mistake. She had never seen the two men together since her engagement until now, and after three or four months of absence it is possible that Ralph's power, which was at once strong and magnetic, had diminished a little. It was certainly less complete and overwhelming. She was, therefore, able to look at him without prejudice, and the impression he now produced was an almost startling one. She felt, indeed, a sudden and absurd impulse to turn to Billy for protection! It was gone almost as soon as it had come, but there had been time to recognize it as the outcome of a very definite fear.

Afterward she made excuses for herself. Her nerves had been so thoroughly upset by the disas-

trous folly of the séance at East Feddon. Ralph had appeared so suddenly when she had thought that he was still in Africa, and for the moment she had half believed him to be a ghost. And it was Billy who by his presence of mind and quick courage had saved her from those nebulous dangers last night. White and shaken, she stood there listening to Ralph's words, looking for all the world as if she were going to cry. Indeed, there were tears in her eyes as she raised them to his.

"My dear Pamela — how ill you are looking," he said, in a tone of real concern. "Or perhaps it is the cold. The weather is certainly abominable. Is your car here? If not, we had better take a taxi, hadn't we?"

Pamela indicated the motor with a slight turn of her head. The luggage was just being brought, and Célestine stood there, waiting for her young mistress to get in.

"You will come with me?" She found her voice at last and addressed Ralph almost timidly.

Billy, with whom Ralph had exchanged the most perfunctory of greetings, now held out his hand.

"Good-by, Pam," he said. "Good-by, Mellish. I must push off now, as I've got to catch a train at Paddington."

He walked away with a cheery, unconcerned air.

Pamela got into the car and Ralph sprang in beside her.

"So Mowbray was at East Feddon, too, Pamela?" he said.

"Yes, he was there. It was a large party."

"But you were expected home on Thursday. Why did you come up to-day?" In his jealous distrust he imagined that Mowbray had been responsible for this sudden change of plans.

"I — I couldn't stay," she answered. "The

party broke up. . . ." Her halting phrases sounded pitifully lame and unconvincing.

"Oh, did anything happen?"

"Yes ——"

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No — nothing serious."

His black eyes seemed to hold her prisoner.

"And yet you came away?"

"Yes, Billy and I — and some of the others. We only made up our minds this morning."

"My dear Pamela, it is all engagingly mysterious," he said.

She was silent. The car threaded its way through the stream of traffic in Broad Street at a slow pace.

"I hope Mrs. Blair isn't ill?"

"No — she is quite well. No one was ill."

They had reached the corner by Houndsditch, and the traffic was more dense than before. It was quite five minutes before the car was able to proceed. Pamela watched the hands of the little clock move with a mechanical attention. Near the Bank there was another delay. It was still raining, and a chill easterly wind blew through the streets. The people on the pavements looked pinched and cold. They hurried about their business with heads bent and coats closely buttoned. Even the city loafers, inured to all changes of climate, moved more briskly than usual. The pale faces of the passers-by seemed anxious and harassed, as if the struggle for existence were becoming too heavy a burden. Pamela watched them with interest. She found herself wondering about them, about their daily struggle for food and lodging, an effort never to be relinquished perhaps until death came.

She was silent, forgetting Ralph. But he

watched her, aware of a change in her which provoked his curiosity. She had never once said anything about her pleasure in seeing him. Even her face had expressed no pleasure. Perhaps he had come too suddenly. At any rate he felt that she had, since their last meeting, altered, become suddenly older. Perhaps during the months of their separation she had passed through some strange experience. He did not know that only last night Pamela had awakened to the fact that there existed a man whose love she had rejected and who had proved himself ready to fight the very powers of darkness for her sake. . . .

She shuddered violently with a convulsive movement that stirred her from head to foot.

Ralph caught her hand in his.

"My dear child — you're trembling. What on earth's the matter with you?"

He looked genuinely alarmed; he began to think that his sudden coming had upset her.

"Don't ask me, please," said Pamela.

"Did I come upon you too suddenly? One should never spring surprises on people. It is too great a test." There was a flick of light irony in his tone that jarred her.

"It was nothing to do with you, Ralph," she answered quickly. "I think — my nerves are a little upset."

"And this wind is enough to chill one to the bone." He drew her to him and kissed her. They were passing swiftly along the Embankment now and there were very few people about.

Pamela had often pictured to herself that first kiss after their long separation, but the reality was less perfect than the dream had been. She received the kiss unresponsively, and when he renewed it with an increased ardor she was still passive and

cold. Perhaps it was true that the wind had chilled her. She felt very cold, and Ralph looked cold too; it made her look older, more gray. She thought he had aged a good deal; there seemed to be new lines in his face, as well as more gray in his hair. Billy, with his fresh and rosy face, had looked quite a boy beside him, almost young enough to be his son.

"My dear — my dear — what is the matter?" said Ralph anxiously.

Pamela was silent. She was obstinately determined to give him no hint of all that had passed at East Feddon. She would have preferred not to have seen him again until it had faded a little from her mind. In some obscure way she connected the episode with him. She believed that if Ralph had been present he would have understood something of those harsh and guttural utterances of the medium. He was well known as an Arabic scholar, and he had translated books and verses from Arabic into English. He spoke many dialects fluently, and much of his past work had been performed in countries where that language was spoken. As it was, only Professor Scudamore had understood what had been said, and he had thrown no light upon the mystery.

Pamela did not wish Ralph to know anything about it, because she felt perfectly certain that he would insist upon investigating the matter, interviewing the Professor, and raking up the whole unpleasant incident and, if possible, placing it upon a sane and rational ground.

Pamela longed only to put all thoughts of it from her mind, and she resolved not to speak about it; above all, she desired to keep it from Ralph's knowledge.

"Nothing's the matter," she said at last. "I'm

only cold and a little tired. I had very little lunch and I think I want my tea." She forced herself to smile. "Do tell me why you changed your plans so suddenly.

"I was summoned unexpectedly to Paris on business," he said, "and I had no idea how long I should be detained there. I meant to write and tell you I was there, but I finished all I had to do in twenty-four hours and so left for London last night. I went round to Upper Brook Street early this morning and heard you were down at East Feddon — your telegram had just come to say that you were returning. They told me also that your mother was in Paris."

"Yes — I wonder you didn't run across her," said Pamela, "she will be back on Thursday."

"And now I want our wedding to take place as soon as possible, Pamela," said Ralph. "The sooner we are both back in the sunshine the better. You are looking so ill and nervous that I am simply longing to get you away from England."

He looked at her. She did not speak; there was something strangely controlled about her expression.

"As soon as possible," he repeated.

"Not before Christmas," said Pamela. "You know we always talked of — of early in the New Year."

"Why, that is two months from now," he said. "What do you suppose I am going to do with myself during those two months?"

"I can't be ready before. You have come home quite a month before we expected you," said Pamela. "Please let us keep to our original plan."

"Oh, but I want you to reconsider the matter," said Ralph easily. "You see, I had no idea I should be back so soon. Djebl Anaba is quite

ready for you, Pamela, and December is a charming month there. I am longing to show it to you."

She said: "I couldn't possibly be ready. And there are my bridesmaids to be considered."

"Oh, that doesn't signify. It will be a good excuse for having it as quiet as possible."

The car stopped with a jerk before the tall London house. Ralph sprang out with the activity of a much younger man, and then helped Pamela to alight.

"Won't you come in to tea?" she said hesitatingly.

"No — I won't come in now. You look as if you wanted a rest. I'll look in later."

It was something of a relief to see his tall and rather gaunt figure stalk away toward the Park. Pamela went slowly up to her room. Her whole mind was confused, and she felt absolutely bewildered. It was true, perhaps, that she needed a rest, for her brain seemed to be in a whirl. She wished that her mother had been at home. That eminently worldly and normal presence, so full of sanity and common sense, would, she felt, have reassured her, and put things at once on a calm and rational footing. When Célestine appeared, her first action was to send a telegram to Mrs. Winton, announcing her return home and begging her to come as soon as possible. She added that Ralph had arrived unexpectedly, and thus inadvertently gave her mother the impression that this had been the cause of her own sudden return to town.

She remembered that when Ralph had gone away, scarcely four months ago, she had been so much in love with him that it had almost broken her heart to part with him, even for that short time. She had resisted her mother's entreaty that

the engagement might not be made known until his return. Mrs. Winton had tried to convince Pamela that her feeling for him was an infatuation which time would cure, and that they were absolutely unsuited to each other. Pamela, however, had felt far more inclined to fling herself at his feet and beg him not to go away — not to leave her. And in her perpetual and quotidian contemplation of
d become still more dear to her.
with trembling of that glad day
en she would hear his voice, see
in the touch of his hand, his lips.
suddenly upon her at the station,
nd gray and indefinably changed
ion she had cherished so ardently,
the moment as if he were a
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And it was this stranger who
d her home in the car, who
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dream. Had she really ceased
n? Was he no longer capable
at old passionate feeling in her
r mother been right in saying that
been a passing infatuation which
tion would quickly cure? And if
she had made a mistake would she ever have the courage to tell Ralph so? — to send him back alone to his beloved solitude at Djebl Anaba? Or was this change in her simply the result of some sinister and occult influence that had emanated from that untoward episode at East Feddon? — that glimpse of a dusky face beneath a glimmering white turban, of long, thin, dark fingers that had striven to seize her, and which had been beaten back by Billy? She

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seemed to see before her eyes that final emergence of Billy from the struggle, with his clothing torn and awry, and the marks of fingers staining his young and strong throat. . . .

Everything was indeed so desperately confused and complicated that she seemed incapable of coherent thought. She was no longer sure of herself; she wondered if she had ever really cared for Ralph, ever wished to marry him. Whereas Billy. . . . That idea was equally absurd, since she had refused to marry Billy because she had just awakened to the knowledge that she loved Ralph. No — it was not possible that she could ever fall in love with Billy. He was a dear, but too young, too boyish. His fresh pink face with the blue eyes and reddish hair rose up before her. He had made Ralph look gray and old. She had never found anything specially attractive about Billy's youth before. It was as if her whole point of view had suddenly and causelessly shifted. Yet she had never been capricious; she had even regarded herself as very faithful and unchanging; she had been angry at her mother's suggestion that she could possibly cease to care for Ralph. Now she was alarmed at herself, angry at the change which had taken place in her, almost, as it were, against her will.

She went to the dressing-table and took up Ralph's photograph, as if with an eager desire to experience again the tenderness it had never failed to awaken in her. But it seemed to her that this too wore a strange, an alien mien. It was the face of a man hardened by life, by sharp blows, by adverse fate, by fierce struggles, by innumerable experiences, bitter and sweet, joyful and sad. The eyes were tired. The mouth was hard. On the forehead the hair was growing thin. Even in the photograph he looked austere, a little grim. His

words about their marriage taking place earlier than had been originally settled had awakened a definite antagonism within her. She told herself that nothing would induce her to be married at an earlier date than the first week in January. Then she remembered that if some one had come to her three days ago and told her that in less than a month she could be Ralph's wife, she would have looked upon it as an impossible happiness. Now the very suggestion made her angry. And through her anger there ran a little flaming thread of fear. She was afraid of Ralph. . . .

CHAPTER XI

MRS. WINTON returned from Paris on the following day. She was more than a little perturbed at the abrupt change in her daughter's plans, for which — in the absence of more definite knowledge — she naturally blamed Ralph. She did not, however, approve of her young daughter being alone in town, especially now that her fiancé had returned. Sunday afternoon, therefore, saw her calm and leisurely entrance into her own house.

Pamela had not come to the station to meet her, for Mrs. Winton disliked being met. She preferred to find her daughter sitting in the drawing-room with tea ready in front of her, and a good fire blazing on the hearth to welcome her after a cold and rather bad journey. The Channel had been rough. Mrs. Winton still looked a little pale. But her sharp eyes detected at once that Pamela was not "looking herself."

"Were you really in such a desperate hurry to see Ralph that you could not stay down at East Feddon until Tuesday at least?" inquired Mrs.

Winton when she had drunk her first cup of tea, and was able to take a little intelligent interest in things again.

"I wasn't in a hurry to see Ralph," said her daughter. "How could I be? I did not even know that he was in England."

"Then why did you leave the place so soon?" said Mrs. Winton, opening her pale blue eyes very wide.

"The party broke up yesterday morning — nearly every one came away!"

"Came away? Why, what happened?" said Mrs. Winton.

Had her little plot miscarried? Had Pamela been unable to endure the presence of Billy? She looked nervously at her daughter.

"Please — I would rather not speak of it," said Pamela.

"Who was there?" asked Mrs. Winton.

"Rupert and Father Benedict and Billy and the Saltmarshes . . . and some friends of Mrs. Blair's — Sir James Bett and Mrs. Silva. . . ."

"And did they all leave?"

"I am not sure about the Saltmarshes and Rupert and Father Benedict. Every one else left."

"How very extraordinary. And you can't even tell me what happened?"

"I — I could tell you," said Pamela rather desperately, "but please don't ask me."'

"Then it had nothing at all to do with Ralph?"

"It had nothing at all to do with Ralph."

"Then when did you see Ralph?"

"He came to meet me at Liverpool Street yesterday," said Pamela; "it was a great surprise to me. I had no idea that he was in England. I didn't feel very well when he came in the evening — I didn't see him. But he said that he would be

here to tea to-day. Perhaps he will come soon." She glanced at the clock.

"What brought him back so soon? I hope he is well?" said Mrs. Winton, with that rather stiff politeness she invariably displayed upon the subject of her daughter's fiancé.

"Yes — he looks quite well. He said that he had business in Paris, and that was why he was obliged to come back sooner. It did not take him long — he was only there twenty-four hours."

She rose from her chair. "I will come back presently," she said rather nervously. "I daresay you would like to have a talk with Ralph." She went out of the room.

She had hardly gone when Ralph Mellish was announced. He seemed for the moment surprised to find Mrs. Winton there. Pamela had not informed him that her mother was coming back so soon.

"I didn't know you were back," he said with a smile.

"Oh, I've only just arrived. I thought I had better come when I got Pamela's telegram saying she was in town."

Ralph accepted a cup of tea and sat near the fire.

"I hope Pamela is feeling better?" he said.

"Better? Why, she has not been ill, has she? Now you mention it, perhaps she is looking a little white!"

"She was very much upset when I first saw her yesterday. She wouldn't tell me a word about East Feddon. What do you think happened down there?" said Ralph.

"Happened? What could happen?"

"I am at a loss to conjecture," he said, "but Pamela refused to speak about it, and she seemed

so distressed — so worried — I did not like to press the point."

"She certainly seems disinclined to speak of East Feddon," admitted Mrs. Winton; "she wouldn't tell me why the party broke up, nor why every one came away like that. Pamela isn't often upset. I wonder what it could have been?"

"She was extremely mysterious about it," said Ralph, "and whatever it was, it must have upset her very much. Unless, of course, I am obliged to think the unthinkable."

"The unthinkable?" Mrs. Winton was genuinely puzzled.

"That she wasn't exactly pleased to see me again, you know," said Ralph, smiling.

"Oh, I'm sure that is out of the question," said Mrs. Winton, beginning to feel a little guilty. "Pam is very devoted to you — she was miserable when you went away. I couldn't get her to go anywhere. She was quite tiresome about it. I insisted upon her going to East Feddon, for I thought the change would do her good. Besides, there were workmen here, and I wanted those few days in Paris."

Mrs. Winton's motives were almost always mixed, but, even so, she had purposely omitted to mention the principal one, which was that Billy Mowbray was also to be at East Feddon, and she had wished her daughter to meet him again.

"Perhaps you are not aware that the egregious young Mowbray was also staying at East Feddon — they traveled up by the same train," he said, planting his bomb dexterously.

Mrs. Winton turned rather red. Had her little plot succeeded too well? What had Mellish meant by insinuating that Pamela had not been pleased to see him again?

"I am really inclined," continued Ralph, "to attribute this mood of Pamela's to the influence of young Mowbray!"

"Billy's her cousin — they have always been great friends. I assure you that Billy doesn't count."

"Every one knows that he was in love with her when she became engaged to me," said Mellish; "people even condoled with him!"

"She had refused him, though," said Mrs. Winton; "he must have known that he had no chance."

Now Ralph was ignorant of this fact, for Pamela had not mentioned it, and he was not at all given to gossip. He said lightly:

"I can only tell you that I felt actually *de trop* at Liverpool Street yesterday!"

"I am sure Pamela was delighted to see you," said Mrs. Winton.

"Only we couldn't expect Mowbray to share her joy," said Ralph. "Perhaps Pamela concealed her feelings out of pity for him. He is an idle young cub, and the sooner he gets some work to do the better."

"He is so well off he has no need to work," said Mrs. Winton, "but he spends his time very wisely looking after his properties." She felt inclined to defend Billy, whom she liked, as has been seen, far better than Ralph.

"Did Pamela tell you that I wanted to have our wedding at an earlier date?" he said presently. "I suggested the beginning of December — that is, in about three weeks' time!"

"Oh, she can't possibly be ready," said Mrs. Winton with decision. She was not going to have her daughter rushed into a hasty marriage, especially if she were really beginning to think better of it.

"Why, what on earth is there for her to do?" he asked impatiently.

"She has hardly begun to get her trousseau," said Mrs. Winton.

"You can send it on to her afterward," he said.

"What did Pamela say to this suggestion?" asked Mrs. Winton.

"She said — just as you have done — that she couldn't be ready. We've waited quite long enough — and Djebl Anaba is perfectly ready for her."

With his mouth and chin set in those strenuously determined lines, he looked, she thought, quite capable of seizing Pamela and carrying her off, like a primitive cave-man.

"I hope you will try to persuade her," he said.

"Oh, I'm sure I couldn't do that," said Mrs. Winton. "Pamela is very obstinate. I've never known her to do anything she didn't want to do since she was quite a little child. It was no use scolding or punishing her — you couldn't move her."

"Oh, well, it is for her to decide — she must think it over," he said, rising. "I'll come in again to-morrow afternoon — I have to go down to the City in the morning. I hope Pamela will see me then."

"But she is in — you can see her now if you will wait a few minutes. I will send up word that you are here."

"No, don't disturb her to-day — especially as she still seems upset," said Ralph. "Tell her I will come to-morrow." He said good-by rather hurriedly, almost as if he did not wish to see Pamela.

He went away, leaving Mrs. Winton alone and deeply wondering. What did it all mean? Why

could not Pamela speak and put an end to their anxiety on her behalf?

About half an hour later Pamela re-appeared.

"Isn't Ralph here?"

"He has gone. He refused to wait. You seem to have upset him — you and Billy between you!"

"Billy!" repeated Pamela in astonishment. "Why, what in the world has Billy got to do with it?"

"He thought you didn't either of you look frightfully pleased to see him when he met you at the station yesterday," said Mrs. Winton in a sub-acid tone.

Her interview with Ralph had ruffled her. He had evidently been annoyed, and he had vented his annoyance and anxiety upon her, despite the fact that she had only just arrived at home again after a most disagreeable and even painful journey.

It was clearly Pamela's business to soothe the annoyance of Ralph and not leave this task to her mother.

And was it not too late, with Ralph, so to speak, at the door, to urge the claims of Billy? Mrs. Winton began to fear that she had acted without judgment in persuading Pamela to go to East Feddon. Only she had not had the faintest idea that Ralph had changed his plans and intended to return immediately.

"I was surprised — that was all," said Pamela rather reluctantly, "and I hate surprises."

Billy's flushed, dismayed face as he first caught sight of Ralph returned rather vividly to her remembrance.

"I daresay Ralph is inclined to be jealous," said Mrs. Winton, "those dark men often are. . . .

Do you think you will change the time of your wedding, Pam?"

"Why should I?" said Pamela.

"Ralph seemed to wish it. He wants to get back, I think."

"I haven't had time to consider it," said Pamela. "I am sure, we shall not have got everything done in three weeks."

"Of course he wanted to know about — about East Feddon. I couldn't tell him anything," said Mrs. Winton.

"Does he still want to know about it?" said Pamela uneasily.

It was this fear which had kept her upstairs, although she knew perfectly well that Ralph was in the drawing-room.

"I'm afraid it wasn't very wise of you to travel with Billy," said Mrs. Winton. "It was rather unfortunate, too, that Ralph should have met you under the circumstances. He doesn't understand that Billy is more like a brother than a cousin."

"We didn't travel together," said Pamela, flushing; "I traveled alone with Célestine. I didn't even know he was in the same train till we met at the station."

She spoke slowly, unwillingly.

"I think I should explain all that to Ralph next time you see him. I am sure he thought you were together."

Pamela rose restlessly. Everything was so confused that it seemed scarcely worth while to explain anything, or to try to clear up any misunderstanding.

"Pamela — you are not hesitating, are you? You are not thinking of drawing back?" said Mrs. Winton.

"Drawing back?" She knitted her delicate

dark brows as if she did not quite understand.

"I mean — you do still wish to marry Ralph?"

In the pause that followed this brave question, Mrs. Winton did not dare glance at her daughter.

"Why, what can I have done, mother, to make you think I wished to break my promise to Ralph?" said Pamela.

"I thought you seemed a little upset and unsettled," said Mrs. Winton. "You know," she added, "you can always rely upon my help. If you feel that you were a little hasty and — and foolish about making that promise I would speak to Ralph for you."

"But I do not feel that I was hasty or foolish," said Pamela.

She knew that she had made two perfectly evasive answers, leaving her mother as wise as she was before. Under the circumstances, there had seemed no other course open to her, and, afraid that the questioning might continue, she went quietly out of the room.

CHAPTER XII

It was a relief to Pamela on the following day to hear that Billy was in the drawing-room and wished to see her. Her mother had gone out, and Pamela ran downstairs feeling something of the gaiety of a released schoolgirl. She had been longing to see Billy, and she wondered a little why he had returned to town so quickly. He was the only person with whom she could at present speak quite frankly, and her face brightened with pleasure as she approached him.

But the first sight of him disappointed her. Billy was very pale; he had lost his cheerful serenity,

and his distressed blue eyes sought hers almost wistfully.

"Oh, Pam — I've seen Rupert," he said.

"Rupert?" She looked at him questioningly. She had imagined that he had come to see how she was. "What do you mean?"

"He wired to me to meet him this morning. He is in a terrible state of mind. In the first place, he has turned his stepmother out of East Feddon."

"Because of the other night?" asked Pamela.

"Yes — because of the other night."

"But isn't that rather nonsense?"

"He explained to me what Catholics think about these things," said Billy gravely; "it didn't sound like nonsense. He thinks of sending in his papers, and going down to live there himself — for the sake of the mission. It seems a good scheme."

"But isn't it a little hard on poor Mrs. Blair? She was so devoted to the place. I wonder where she will go?"

Billy shrugged his shoulders.

"She is awfully angry, of course. She says she will never speak to him again. And she blames me because I gave the show away to him. I felt simply obliged to tell him, Pam. The house is his. I tell you, I was a skeptic till the other night, and then I felt that devils had been let loose in the place. Didn't you feel that, Pamela?"

Pamela rose and moved restlessly up and down the room. A sense of unreality possessed her. The whole episode seemed too much like a nightmare; even now she could hardly believe that it had really happened.

"We were all dreadfully upset and unnerved," said Pamela, trying to speak in a cold and indifferent voice. "I felt unhinged myself. I wasn't sure that the Professor wasn't trying to hypnotize us.

But as for believing that anything — any one — besides ourselves was present, Billy, that would be very foolish, surely?"

She looked at him pitifully, as if entreating him to agree with her.

"Foolish?" he said. "Why, you must be extraordinarily hard to convince. Even Scudamore was alarmed for the moment, and I am sure he is made of steel. By the way, he has vanished — no one knows where he is. Rupert says that he should prosecute him, only he does not want to make a scandal, in which his stepmother is mixed up, public. But the fact is, he's been getting enormous sums out of Mrs. Blair — money that was given to her for the specific purpose of keeping up East Feddon."

"He did this kind of thing for money?" said Pamela.

"Well, I never imagined that he did it, as the Americans say, for the good of his health," said Billy, with a short laugh. "Anyhow, he's got a lot out of Mrs. Blair — she was one of his easiest dupes. I'm glad he has gone with his devil's tricks. I shouldn't think he would ever show his face in England again!"

"Why do you think he warned me not to go abroad?" said Pamela. "Do you think it had anything to do with what the medium said? Why did she speak Arabic?"

Billy looked at her in astonishment. She had independently arrived at precisely the same conclusion which he shared with Professor Scudamore — the theory that the control had in life been an enemy of Ralph Mellish's and desired to avenge some real or fancied wrong by attacking his fiancée.

"Are you fretting about that, Pam?" he said gravely.

"I can't help thinking of it, Billy," she said.

"As long as I live," said Mowbray, "I will never touch spiritualism again. Of course, I know we might have gone on for years and never had an experience of the kind. The Professor has only known two other instances. Still, I think the Catholics are right. They won't have anything to do with things like that, even in fun. How ill you look to-day, Pamela!"

"Oh, I'm not ill." She pushed the heavy dark hair back from her brow. "Only I can not help thinking about it." Then, with an effort, she added: "Ralph wants our wedding to be in about three weeks' time, instead of having it after the New Year."

Mowbray's face hardened.

"As soon as that?" he said.

He wished that he could honorably have urged delay.

"You are not going, then, to pay any attention to Scudamore's warning?" he said.

"Oh, no," said Pamela hastily. "Only I haven't settled yet whether I shall give in and have it sooner."

"I can't help wishing that you would wait till the New Year," said Billy.

"Ralph is in a hurry to get back — he doesn't want to spend nearly two months in England."

"What does Mrs. Winton say?" asked Billy.

"Mother? Oh, she isn't anxious to get rid of me," said Pamela, trying to laugh; "and then, you know, she never much wanted me to marry Ralph."

"I suppose not," said Billy dryly.

"And of course it would mean hurrying things on a lot. If Ralph had come a week earlier, it would have been different. But now — Billy. . . ."

She came a step nearer to him. She was strangely alone, but she had a great need to speak to some one, and she knew that Billy's affection for her was very great, very enduring. She knew that she could trust him implicitly. She longed to tell him of this new fear that dominated her — a fear of Ralph so great that it seemed to have overpowered the love she had once felt for him. "Billy . . ." she said again, almost imploringly.

She stopped hesitatingly. Billy waited for her to speak. It had never entered his head that Pamela could change toward Ralph, whom she had promised to marry. He had scoffed at the notion when the Professor had suggested it to him, and informed him also that he could, if he chose, win Pamela's love for himself. She had promised to marry Ralph in the face of a great deal of real and tacit opposition and disapproval. It was not likely that a girl who had successfully weathered that first storm of protest would cease to care for such a very slight reason — that she had been warned by a man who was more than half an imposter that it would be advisable for her not to go abroad.

Billy was perfectly aware at that moment that if he had taken advantage of this strange, new mood of Pamela's, he could have persuaded her to break off her engagement and abandon forever the idea of living at Djebl Anaba. He knew that it was — to use a common expression — up to him to do this. And he instinctively drew back a little. He wished to wipe out that whole episode at East Feddon from the slate of his life. He wished to free himself from its influence. He did not wish wilfully to yield himself to that influence, nor to follow in any way the suggestions of Professor Scudamore. Let Pamela break off her engage-

ment if she so desired, but it should never be his part to urge her to do this. His young face hardened a little. She was so beautiful, she looked at him so pitifully; he had but to put out his hand to touch hers — to take her in his arms and promise to love and protect her forever — forever.

Across the silence he seemed to hear that flat, even voice saying: "*To-night there was a change. Perhaps you loved her a little more. Perhaps you loved honor a little less. . . .*" The remembrance made him harden his heart a little toward Pamela. She, quick to detect his lack of sympathy in him, and believing that he had somehow ceased to care for her, drew back a little. She could not tell him. He would think her false and perfidious. Yes — even Billy seemed to have failed her. She felt that he had repelled that confidence she had wished to make. She drew back a little, the tears made her eyes smart, and in the pause that followed Ralph's name was announced.

If his quiet entrance was a trifle dramatic, coming as it did at this particular moment, Ralph appeared at least perfectly serene and unperturbed. He greeted Billy quite cordially and smiled as he took Pamela's hand. But she thought him looking even more gray and austere than he had done on Saturday.

Billy took his leave very soon afterwards. He tried to believe that the lovers still wished to be alone, and he hurriedly bade them farewell.

When he had gone Ralph said coolly, with a touch of irony in his voice:

"What a charming boy Billy is. In ten years' time he will make some nice girl very happy!"

Pamela did not speak. In ten years? Billy was already twenty-six, and in possession of a large fortune; had he so chosen he could surely have made

some nice girl happy now. Perhaps there had been some foundation for her mother's suggestion that Ralph was jealous.

"He came to tell me that Rupert Blair has quarreled with his stepmother. He has turned her out of East Feddon," she said, taking no notice of Ralph's remark. "She is not to live there any more."

"Oh, I thought they got on so well," said Ralph.

"So they did. But they have quarreled," said Pamela.

An idea occurred to him. He began to see a glimmer of illumination.

"Is this the outcome of something that happened while you were there last week?"

"Yes," said Pamela with an effort. "I suppose it is the outcome."

"And what was it that happened?" said Ralph.

He waited for her answer. It had been in his mind ever since their meeting at Liverpool Street on Saturday that there had been something both peculiar and mysterious in the events that had broken up the party at East Feddon, and had thrown Pamela, so to speak, back into something of the old intimacy with her cousin. He had felt that it must have been something which had forced her to seek Billy's help and protection. He had a violent and half-jealous curiosity to know the exact nature of this obscure and perhaps tragic episode of which she was obviously so extremely reluctant to speak.

"It was something which annoyed Father Benedict — the Jesuit who is Rupert's guardian — something which he thought inconsistent with a Catholic household. I can not tell you any more, Ralph — I do not want to speak of it. It doesn't seem fair — does it? — to repeat anything that

happens in a house where one is staying as a guest."

"Still, this seems a pretty well-known secret. Billy and Rupert and yourself, and probably all the others who fled away so abruptly must all have known about it," he said.

Pamela turned very white. It seemed to her that the whole scene was being reconstructed as the French police reconstruct the scene of a crime before the eyes of the accused culprit — a subtle form of torture which leads so often to a complete admission of guilt. Especially she saw the little figure of Professor Scudamore in his Chinese gown with his bland and smiling face, and the shining gold rim of his spectacles, behind which his eyes were blazing with a peculiar and almost sinister glitter. She saw the darkened room, with its fitful gleams of light from the dying fire; she saw the fat, white face of the medium, common, coarse, repellent in its profound slumber; and she heard her own cry — so strange, so fierce with horror that she could hardly believe that it had emanated from her own lips . . . and then, in the midst of the confusion and the darkness that held a formless terror, Billy's strong young arms were thrust out to seize and save her. . . .

Then she was aware that Ralph had left his seat and had come over to her side. He knelt down and took her hands in his.

"Dear Pamela," he said, with a strange new softness in his voice, "I wish you would tell me all about it. You are letting it hurt you, and I, above all, can not help being sensible of the change in you. You have changed . . . even to me. . . ."

He held her hands, caressing them. He knew now that the task of winning Pamela's love had to be performed anew. She was subtly but entirely estranged. All his indomitable will must be

brought to the gigantic effort of reawakening that love which had once been his in full measure.

"I have come back to find you changed," he said. "Yesterday you avoided me. I felt that you did not care to see me. If you do not wish to marry me, Pamela, you must say so. I am not going to let you spoil your young life for any promise you may have made to me last summer."

And he raised her hands to his lips, kissing them one after the other. She looked down into his face.

"I don't understand myself any more, Ralph. I don't know what has happened to me."

She leaned back in her chair white and exhausted. There was a look of fatigue, of delicacy, in her face. She was spent with unaccustomed emotion.

"Couldn't you tell me about East Feddon?" he said obstinately, "since that seems to hold the clue to the mystery."

Mellish could be very persuasive if he chose. He knew when to command, when to suggest, when to entreat. It had been said of him that he had never failed to make a woman love him when he had set himself out to achieve this end. And many women had loved him, as it had even seemed to them, unbidden and unasked. Until he had met Pamela he had never desired to possess permanently any one's love. And now she had been the one to change, to show caprice, a waning love, a spent emotion.

"I love you, Pamela," he said gently; "don't tell me that you do not love me any more. . . ."

His languid voice was not quite steady; it seemed to him that she held his very life in those two pale and fragile hands of hers.

And as she sat there something of the old love that had been so wonderful a thing, isolating her from her fellow-creatures, exacting, imperious, con-

quering, stirred anew in her heart. It seemed to blot out the Professor's warning; it conquered even her fear of the prospect of going to Africa. She bent her head a little toward him.

"Oh, Ralph — of course, I love you," she said.

He had broken down the barrier and she was able to tell him about the terrific incident which had marred her visit to East Feddon.

As he listened, Ralph's face hardened until it looked as if it had been cast in an iron mold. His dark eyes were fixed upon hers, and once she thought to discern in them an expression of slowly gathering horror. Especially was his mouth grim and set when she told him of the harsh and guttural utterances of the Arabic-speaking control; of the vision, fugitive but menacing, of that dusky face under its gleamning turban, and the thin, dark fingers from whose clutch Billy had saved her. She shivered as she spoke and clung to Ralph, whose arm held her now protectingly. Something of the horror of it all had diminished in the telling. She had longed yet feared to tell him. She had believed that he would scoff and mock at her fears; she had never imagined that he would and could share them.

His arms relaxed a little from their hold upon her. A darkness came over his face, and he looked like a man who is passing through some definite emotional crisis. When she had finished, he did not speak. She fancied she could see some of her own haunting fear reflected in the dark gloom of his eyes.

"You don't think I was foolish to be so frightened?" she said.

Ralph looked up.

"No — I shouldn't call you foolish," he said.

There was silence. She felt, rather than knew,

that he was ill at ease, that her recital had affected him very profoundly.

"You were in great danger," he said at last, "in great danger. We can not quite tell how great because — fortunately for you — young Mowbray was there to save you. He —" and now his voice trembled a little — "he went into the burning house to save you, Pamela."

He looked at her reverently, as if she had passed through some grave physical illness in which she had gone down very near to the gate of death.

"The burning house?" she echoed.

"Yes — the burning house," said Ralph. "What induced Mrs. Blair to play with these things? Who is this man Scudamore? Why does he let her summon forces — intelligences — of whose nature and power she knows nothing? It must be from crass ignorance or blind folly — or from unimaginable malice!"

"You believe in it, then?" said Pamela. "I thought you would scoff and think me nervous and cowardly!"

"My dear child — I have not spent twenty years in Africa for nothing!" he said. "I have seen and heard things there which it would puzzle the wisest scientist to explain."

His words sent a cold shiver through Pamela. He smiled reassuringly.

"Don't be afraid," he said in his slow, soft voice, "you'll find everything quite pleasant and normal at Djebl Anaba. You will come soon, won't you, Pamela?"

And with a renewal of the old confidence which had for a short time so completely deserted her, Pamela said:

"Whenever you wish, Ralph."

She had come back to him like a wounded hom-

ing bird, and as he went away he felt a curious thrill of quiet happiness that was not all like triumph. Only the thought of Billy still disturbed him. Billy, who had faced the very legions of darkness and had carried Pamela out of the devouring flames of the burning house — Billy, who had not emerged unscathed from that grim conflict. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

THE train traveled slowly through the mild and mitigated winter landscape of the South. The planes and acacias were now almost stripped of their burden of shimmering gold leaves, and their stems and branches were curiously pale against the dusty white road which they guarded in twin rows for many a mile. The evergreen foliage of olive and cork tree and ilex invested the Algerian forests with an appearance of unceasing summer, to which the brilliant noonday sunshine lent a factitious support.

Pamela sat at the window watching the great range of mountains that guarded on its southern side the fertile strip of country known in northern Africa as the Tell. They were beautiful in outline and coloring, with their slopes thickly clothed with the gray-green brushwood that had the appearance of a miniature jungle. The shadows that lay upon them were of a deep and pure blue.

The leisurely progress of the train enabled her to see all the details of this land through which they were passing. Immense orange orchards, heavily hung with golden fruit, were planted in strictly symmetrical rows, so straight and regular that they produced the effect of a conventional design. Sometimes a group of Kabyles could be seen

working in the orchards or digging diligently in the vineyards. Here and there they passed a homestead, with the house long and low and painted white, with a veranda running round it, and gray persiennes flung back to disclose the windows, and a bright red roof that lent an abrupt blot of color. Near by stood a row of barns, while another building, walled and secretive-looking, showed the place where the wine was made. The vineyards, which covered acres and acres of land, were quite bare except for the brown, stunted stems of the vines. Immense wild-olive trees with wide-spreading branches shaded the buildings of homestead and farm. Sometimes the train plunged through a strip of forest, somber and gloomy and thickly grown with a tangle of undergrowth. Then, passing out again into the open country, it crossed a river that wound its way through a deep cleft and then wandered, a thin stream of light, through a wide bed of sand and rocks, to lose itself again in the deep forest fastnesses.

Pamela and her husband had arrived at the little Mediterranean port of St. Augustin late the night before, and had left by the early train for St. Jean, which was the nearest station to Djebl Anaba. They had slept on board, as the boat, delayed by the rough crossing, had been very late in arriving. But Pamela had not been able to sleep a great deal. There was too much noise. From the moment of their arrival the sounds had been incessant — the creaking of chains and crane, the unloading of cargo and luggage, the hoarse shouts of the sailors, the perpetual chatter of the Arab porters who had clustered idly on the quay in the hope of being employed.

Through the port-hole of her cabin Pamela had caught a glimpse of the little town, with its white

buildings and wide, white boulevards shaded with trees that were carefully pollarded and shaped almost like umbrellas so as to give the maximum of shade. The town was built upon the steep slopes of a hill, whose contour it followed; the houses, rising terrace upon terrace from the level of the harbor to the crest of the hill, were interspersed with woods that gave it a very charming appearance.

It was hardly light when she and Ralph went ashore. A cold wind blew from the mountains, sharp, keen, with almost a hint of snow. In spite of her long fur coat, Pamela shivered. She was not a very good traveler, and it had cost her a great effort to keep pace with Ralph, who was both a hardened and seasoned one. Indeed, he scarcely regarded the journey to Djebl Anaba as traveling at all. He was so accustomed to taking a run home, as he expressed it, that he suffered neither fatigue nor inconvenience from it. The roughest sea failed to affect him, and he slept as soundly in the train as he did in his own bed. Pamela had done very little traveling in her life, and then always by slow and easy stages which never involved either very early starts or late arrivals.

By this time she was feeling very cold and strange and rather homesick. Ralph was absorbed in the prospect of his return to Djebl Anaba. He had seen to the luggage, made all the arrangements, and told Pamela and Célestine at what time they must be ready. Pamela had obeyed almost mechanically. She had been married about three weeks, and was learning to be ready and punctual, but she found the effort very trying after the long night journey to Marseilles, followed by nearly forty hours of a singularly rough and unpleasant sea-voyage. The sunshine comforted her a little now, and she liked to sit there idly and watch the bright

landscape with its opulent orange orchards and immense fields and enchanting forests.

After some hours of traveling, they arrived at the little wayside station of St. Jean, where Ralph's car met them. Very soon their trunks had been placed upon it, and she and Ralph entered the tonneau of the car. Célestine sat with the chauffeur in front. In a few minutes they had started upon their journey to the Five Fountains, beyond which village Djebl Anaba was situated.

It seemed to Pamela during that long and swift drive that they must have plunged into the very heart of Africa. Sometimes the car sped up steep hills, over roads that were wide and dusty and circled them like twisting ribbons. Here and there they passed a farm set in a grove of silvery olives with orange orchards and vineyards surrounding it, or a little village where the Arab children ran out to watch them pass with eager curiosity. Then, for a considerable distance, they would travel through tracts of forest, wild, mysterious, and silent. There was something almost terrifying about the loneliness and mystery of these forests. It seemed as if they must hold so many undiscovered secrets, profound and sinister secrets, as of strange crimes committed and undetected; their very immensity precluded investigation.

Pamela began to realize what the solitude of Djebl Anaba must be, set so far from human habitation. Why had Ralph chosen it? He had told her once that he had come suddenly upon the old Arab house built long ago by the caprice of some wealthy Kaid of the desert, whose eyes had grown weary of the shadeless sands of the Sahara and who had desired a place of green and fertile *villeggiatura.* Long since uninhabited and left to decay, it was half in ruins when Ralph chanced upon it in

his wanderings and had bought the property for the proverbial song. It fascinated him, and little by little he had rebuilt the house, making the solid walls strong again, conquering the wilderness which had once been a garden. For the last seven years he had spent a great deal of his time there, working and studying. One room, he had told her, had been made into a library, and it was filled with all kinds of books, English, French, and Oriental.

It was late in the afternoon when they drew up before the old iron gates which Ralph had erected at the entrance to the long avenue of waving date-palms leading from the road to the house, which lay half hidden by a thick grove of ilex-trees. At a turn of the road, they came in sight of the building — a long white house with two wings that enclosed three sides of a courtyard. With its minaret tower and flat roof and deep, wide verandas it had all the appearance of a small Oriental palace. Tall eucalyptus and ilex-trees made a soft background of green. The geraniums and roses were still blooming on the terraces, and a faint perfume of violets filled the air. The place looked beautiful — ready for its owner — ready, too, for the woman he loved, whom he had brought hither as his young bride.

The Arab servants were grouped upon the veranda in attitudes of eager welcome. It was one of Ralph's fads to have only Arab servants, with the exception of his own valet, Robinson, and the French chauffeur. Their white-clad and turbaned forms looked very clean and trim.

They had just alighted from the car and Pamela was gazing at the sky, painted now with a superb sunset, and at the long sweep of dark forests that lay for miles to the westward, touching the feet of those splendid distant mountains, when a tall Arab,

dressed in a dark blue burnous and wearing high red boots, rode up from the opposite direction. He dismounted from his superb horse and came slowly toward Ralph.

Ralph, who was just giving some directions to the chauffeur, turned and greeted him, speaking a few words of rapid Arabic. He was startled by hearing a sudden shrill scream at his side. Pamela had fallen face forward on the terrace in a deep faint. . . .

He raised her in his arms and carried her into the house.

When Pamela had been restored to consciousness by the united and anxious efforts of her husband and Célestine, she found herself lying upon a low divan above which a tentlike arrangement of gorgeous silken curtains had been erected. The windows of the room were open and she could hear the faint rustle of the trees outside. The wind stirred the curtains above her till they became inflated like a balloon, for they were fashioned of a silk that was at once flimsy and very supple. An electric lamp burned on the table at the foot of the bed. It was shaded with rose-colored silk which matched the curtains of the divan and some of the hangings.

She gazed round the room, hardly knowing whether she were asleep or awake. But she noticed in an idle, mechanical way that the walls were distempered in a shade of soft, creamy whiteness, the color of old ivory, that was very restful to the eyes. There were no pictures, but the flat, bare expanse was not unpleasing, and the shadow of a large palm at one end of the room was thrown upon the wall at right angles in a faint gray silhouette that reminded her of a painting on some old and fine Japanese screen. The floor was of red tiles, and over it were thrown several large Oriental rugs

of indefinite pattern and subdued though rich coloring. Some large chests of drawers stood against the walls, and a high, narrow cupboard rather Italian in design. The room was immense and spacious. On a chair close to the bedside Ralph sat, watching her with anxious eyes. He looked very austere, and the expression of his face was stern and perplexed.

Pamela felt as if she had awakened from a very prolonged dream. She could not remember all its details, but it had been long and strange.

Ralph touched her hand gently.

"Are you feeling better, dearest?" he said.

"I haven't been ill, have I?" she asked.

The very strangeness of her surroundings, which were both novel and unaccustomed, puzzled her. Before he could answer, she said:

"I don't know where I am, Ralph. I don't seem to know this room. . . . What has happened?"

"You are at Djebl Anaba," he said quietly.

"At Djebl Anaba?" she repeated incredulously. "Have we really got here?"

"Yes," he said, "I'm afraid the journey upset and tired you. I forgot you were not accustomed to traveling. I shouldn't have let you make that early start. You must forgive me, Pamela. You — you fainted as soon as you got out of the car. . . ."

Did she remember nothing of it all?

"Oh, what nonsense! I never faint!" said Pamela, almost with petulance.

Ralph had spent more than half an hour in a strenuous endeavor to restore her to consciousness. The attack had proved a singularly obstinate one and it had alarmed him. It had also alarmed Cé-

lestine, who had been in Pamela's service for several years, and she had informed him that she had never known such a thing to happen before. He had been full of contrition and self-reproach, and felt that he had been too exacting in his demands upon her strength.

"It — it was just as Aziz came up and spoke to me," he said, as if trying to remind her of the incident of their arrival.

"Aziz?" She knitted her brows uncomprehendingly.

"An Arab wearing a dark blue burnous. He rode up just as we arrived. Didn't you notice him?"

Her face became as pale as death; a slight moaning sound as of helpless, inarticulate terror escaped her. Ralph believed that she was about to faint a second time.

"The Arab — the Arab — with the turban," she said.

"Why, what do you mean, dear? Of course, he wears a turban. All Mohammedans cover their heads either with a fez or turban."

She put out her hand and clutched Ralph's, with a violence that had something fierce in it.

"Was he really there? I didn't dream it, did I?"

"Dream it? Why, of course he was there. He came to see me. He lives over at Aïn-Khramsa — the Five Fountains, as we should call it. He is a friend of mine."

"He was like — the one at East Feddon!" she said in a tone of horror, her voice sinking to a low whisper as if she were afraid of being overheard.

As she spoke, Ralph shrank away from her. A

curious expression came into his face. It seemed as if he were withdrawing into himself, hiding deliberately behind a mask.

"Oh, Pamela — you must really try to forget that," he said, with gentle remonstrance; "you mustn't let yourself think about it or brood upon it. You will become unbalanced and hysterical."

"I — I can't help it, Ralph. I — I dream about it," she said, and the tears came into her eyes as she spoke. "Please don't be angry with me. I would forget it if I could." She leaned her head against the soft cushions of the couch, and closed her eyes.

"But I don't want you to be afraid of Aziz," he said slowly; "he is our nearest neighbor and he has been of great assistance to me. Besides, he is a very cultivated, well-educated Arab, and is an agreeable man. He often comes to consult me."

"I don't think I shall like living among Arabs, Ralph," she said.

"I daresay it will seem a little strange at first, having Arab servants and so forth. But think of the thousands of Englishwomen who live in India without a single European servant. I am sure you will soon accustom yourself to your new life."

Her new life? Yes, she was alone with Ralph in the very heart of a strange country. Miles and miles from the nearest station, through wild, desolate ways of forest and mountain.

"Oh, Pamela — I do want you to like it!" he said, with an almost boyish eagerness.

She was silent. She knew that if it had not been for that incident at East Feddon she would have loved the novelty of it all. Now it was poisoned by the remembrance of that night of horror.

"I think I am tired, Ralph," she said. "I should like to go to sleep." Her voice became a

tired murmur. A sense of sudden physical ease came over her, emphasized by the luxurious softness of her couch, the faint silken rustle of those curtains flapping above her head. "Célestine can come and wake me when it is time to dress for dinner. It isn't late, is it?"

"No," he said, "it is only just six. Would you like me to go away?"

"Yes — don't stay. I shall soon be asleep." She put out her hand languidly and touched his. He bent down and kissed her, and then stole quietly out of the room.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Ralph left Pamela, he went down a long, wide corridor which resembled a glazed veranda, climbed a short flight of steps and opened a door which led to the apartments he had always occupied as a bachelor. The first room he entered was the immense library — one of the finest rooms in the house, beyond which lay other reception rooms. There was also another door on the right which communicated with the apartments he had kept for his personal use.

"I am sorry to have kept you so long," he said in his soft, languid voice as he went forward toward Aziz, who rose from an arm-chair and stood there erect and gigantic in his flowing burnous.

He was very upright, very majestic in appearance. His expression was that one of very arrogant, almost insolent, detachment which is peculiar to the Oriental, as if present surroundings and circumstances were mere accidents and quite beneath his notice.

"I heard that you were to return to-day, Mr. Mellish, and I lost no time in calling upon you. I am sorry that I arrived at a moment which seemed inopportune."

He spoke English with considerable fluency.

"I have brought my bride with me. She — she was not very well, she was overtired with the long journey," said Ralph.

The Arab was silent. He did not discuss women, that would have been a grave breach of Mohammedan custom. But he had caught a glimpse of that unveiled and beautiful face, with the fairness of the North in its complexion of lily and rose, and he wondered at European customs, at their carelessness, their challenging indifference.

"I suppose you have not discovered anything more?" said Ralph.

"Nothing whatever," replied the Arab; "it begins to seem quite a hopeless quest. But we have a saying, as perhaps you know: 'Patience is the remedy for all things, but for the lack of patience there is no remedy.'"

He fastened his gray eyes upon Ralph as he spoke.

There had been a tragedy at Aïn-Khramsa some months previously, and it was in consequence of this, and in their combined endeavor to trace the culprit, that Ralph and Aziz, always on friendly and neighborly terms had been thrust into an intimacy which was perhaps unusual between two men of different race and creed.

The Arab had an only brother, Mahmoud, to whom he was extremely devoted, a man of bad reputation and rather reckless character. He had become engaged to a beautiful young Arab girl who lived not far from Aïn-Khramsa. It was said that she held some of those advanced views now

growing more and more prevalent among the educated Arabs, and she insisted upon his first sending away an older wife, whom he had had for upward of ten years. Rumor said that the girl had a lover whom she wished to marry, and that the fiancé chosen for her by her father was hateful to her, and that she hoped, by making this condition, to delay the marriage at least for a time. This knowledge had penetrated to the ears of Mahmoud, and soon afterward both were discovered dead under circumstances that left little room for doubt that a crime had been perpetrated. The girl was found drowned in a curious subterranean lake within an immense cave between Aïn-Khramsa and Djebl Anaba, and the man's body was discovered in the forest about a mile away, shot through the heart. A revolver was lying by his side, and it was believed that he had killed her in an access of jealous fury and then committed suicide. But the story of the secret lover lacked confirmation and he had not been found. One theory was that both had been killed by the brother of Mahmoud's first wife, who was incensed at the humiliation awaiting his sister. But there was one point which seemed rather to confirm the existence of the supposed lover. When her body was found she was wearing upon her left hand a ring set with a fine old Egyptian scarab which could not be identified by any of her own relations. It had been a very tragic and sad affair, and Aziz, overwhelmed with grief at the loss of his favorite brother had turned to Ralph for sympathy and counsel.

Aziz cherished a flaming vendetta in his heart against this unknown man who had stained the honor of his family and led his sister astray. A blood feud thus established could only be wiped out by blood, and it was his one desire to slay this

unknown enemy whose very name had been so craftily concealed.

Ralph, touched by Aziz's grief and by his entreaties for assistance, had promised to help him as far as lay in his power, although he was aware of the danger to which it exposed him. A strange friendship had thus sprung up between the two men, and they had met constantly until Ralph had left for England in the summer. That visit had culminated in his engagement to Pamela Winton, and on his return he had seen less of Aziz, who was away visiting his own tribe in the desert. He was a very rich Arab, who owned vast and wealthy properties which occupied a great deal of his time and attention. He had been many times in Europe and spoke both French and English with ease and fluency.

As the two men stood there facing each other there was something not altogether unlike about them — the Englishman who had lived so long among Orientals that he had acquired at least some of their surface characteristics, and the Arab who had deliberately become semi-Europeanized. They had reached a point at which they could meet on sufficiently equal terms — as nearly, that is to say, as East and West can ever meet. Yet both perhaps had the same feeling — that in cultivating this friendship, this intimacy, they were both in a sense losing caste. It produced a certain contempt of themselves and of each other in their minds. Both had stooped in order to meet — had stepped to a lower plane than custom and tradition permitted to make intimacy possible.

Aziz had fallen a little under Ralph's influence, had felt the power of this man with his soft voice and cold, repressed manner. He was, in a sense, fascinated by him. He consulted him constantly

about all kinds of matters and, as a rule, followed his advice implicitly. And Ralph liked the Arab because of his advanced views and his passionate belief in the future of Islam. Enthusiasm of any kind always stirred him. Also his solitary life at Djebl Anaba might have proved at times unendurably lonely had it not been for the friendship, so flatteringly eager, of Aziz.

But to-day, under the new conditions, Ralph felt the man's visit to be almost an intrusion. He and Pamela were still, so to speak, on their honeymoon; they had been married little more than a month. Had he explained this to Aziz he would have met, he knew, with a complete lack of comprehension. Nothing sets the East so far from the West as its conception of marriage. Aziz had had three wives, and although he only acknowledged the last and youngest, the others still remained at Aïn-Khramsa. He was sufficiently modern to adopt the fashion of only acknowledging one wife, and he had sometimes taken his present one to Europe with him. Of his domestic life he never spoke, simply because the Arab does not speak of it — that would be a grave breach of etiquette. But Ralph had seen his children, of whom they were four — all sons. They were tall, handsome, and dark-eyed, and it was said that they were wild and passionate children. Aziz had the reputation of being a stern and harsh father, and it was known that no Arab could be more despotic than he in his own house. Ralph had heard many tales of his harshness and violence toward his wives, as well as toward his children; it showed him that the European veneer he had acquired was not very deep, nor was it particularly apparent in his own home. Among the Arabs he was intensely Arab, passionate, revengeful, and crafty. But the one soft point in his hard

nature had been his love for his brother Mahmoud, who had been found dead under such tragic circumstances.

The girl's family had moved away from the Five Fountains soon after the tragedy. How she had escaped from her father's house on the night in question was a mystery which would probably never be solved. The lake was at a considerable distance both from her own home and that of Mahmoud. Perhaps she had made this desperate attempt to win her freedom, for it was known that she had long beaten her wings against the cage which she could only leave to enter another prison even more securely fastened. There had been no signs of violence on her body; she had been simply flung into the dark, underground lake in the dense and gloomy shadows of the cave. She had been beautiful, graceful, and wild as a hawk, and was only just sixteen years old. This melancholy history had for some time profoundly affected Ralph, and he had not quite recovered from the impression it had produced upon him by the time he left for England. But he had never mentioned the history to Pamela, as he was afraid that it might prejudice her against the Arabs, and render her nervous of spending her life at Djebl Anaba.

"I am going to have the cave closed up," said Aziz; "that entrance was only made in recent years. The tourists must content themselves in future with the subterranean lake near Hammam-Meskoutine, which is a far larger one. They come here very little as it is. Last year I do not think more than fifty people visited the cave. And I can not get any of my men to go past it at night — they say there are djinns there. When once a place gets that reputation it is better to shut it up. Don't you agree with me?"

"Certainly," said Ralph. His thoughts were greatly preoccupied with Pamela, and he found himself listening inattentively to Aziz. He wondered if his wife were sleeping, or whether she had awakened and was feeling nervous at his absence. That fainting-fit of hers had thoroughly alarmed him. He had never thought that she was at all delicate, and he feared that the journey had exhausted her.

"I could not even get them to search it, as I wanted them to do," said Aziz.

"To search it?" repeated Ralph.

"For the body of the missing man — for the owner of the scarab ring!" said Aziz.

As he spoke his face darkened and an expression that was evil from its very violence came over it. He was obsessed with this desire for revenge. . . . Ralph shrank a little before that fierce glance.

"Oh, I thought you had quite relinquished that theory," said Ralph, recovering himself with an effort. "You seemed to think that Mahmoud had himself lured her out by sending a message that purported to come from her lover, telling her to meet him at the lake-side. What has made you think otherwise?"

He sat there in the shadow, and the light from the electric lamp fell full upon Aziz's face. Ralph watched him closely as he spoke, and then waited in silence for his answer.

"I found signs of a third person having been present," said Aziz, "and my belief now is that Mahmoud followed her and watched their meeting."

"Don't you think if the other man had been present he would have made some effort to save her?" said Ralph. "He could hardly have been such a coward as to leave her to an infuriated man."

"But if he had been attacked first?" said Aziz

coldly. "Suppose he, too, had been flung into the lake?"

There was silence. Ralph made no reply.

"What makes you think he was there at all?" he said at last.

"From the fact that the ring was not on her hand when she was found," said Aziz.

"Not on her hand?" cried Ralph in astonishment.

"No — it was lying on the ground near the entrance to the cave, where there were signs of a struggle. The watchman who found her picked it up, and, thinking it was hers, slipped it on her finger. He did not mention this fact until recently, when I questioned him very closely. It had appeared insignificant to him. To me it seems of the utmost importance."

"Why don't you have the lake dragged, then?" said Ralph, conscious of a growing impatience. He was longing to return to Pamela. Besides, the dinner-hour was approaching and he was still travel-stained after his long journey.

Aziz seemed to have cast a shadow over his homecoming.

"Because I can not get any one to do it. I tell you they say the cave is haunted by djinns. I have offered enormous sums, but it is of no avail."

"Then I certainly think your wisest course would be to shut the place up," said Ralph.

"I could sleep in peace if I knew for a certainty that traitor was lying there in those black waters!" said Aziz violently. "While I think he may still be walking about the earth I can not rest — my desire to kill him is too great!" He rose from his seat. "I must go home now. I am afraid I am disturbing you on the day of your first home-coming."

"I am a little anxious about my wife," said Ralph. "You must come and see me another day, and then we can talk things over more fully."

He was intensely relieved when Aziz had taken his departure, and he returned with all haste to Pamela.

CHAPTER XV

THAT it was a dangerous experiment to bring any one so young as Pamela to Djebl Anaba did not seem to have occurred to Ralph Mellish, though Mrs. Winton would not have hesitated to point it out to him had he ever sought her opinion upon the subject.

He had reached the age when to some people solitude becomes a passionate necessity; and he loved, above all places in the world, the loneliness and isolated charm of his African home. He had but one wish, that Pamela should share it with him.

The little world of the Five Fountains sufficed him. He knew all the French shop-keepers and petty officials in the place, and was on neighborly terms with them all. But there was no one who could possibly be on terms of friendship with him among the European population, and it was this very lack of neighbors which Pamela found at first so trying a thing.

Ralph was, however, perfectly satisfied. His love for Pamela — a great and possessive love — made him wish only to share the treasure of his solitude with her. Insensibly he had perhaps acquired something of the Oriental's desire to hide his beloved from the eyes of other men. He could not veil her beautiful face, nor screen her windows with *meshrabiyah* lattice-work, but he could hide her in his remote palace, where no sounds were audible

except the cool plash of the fountain in the courtyard, and the rustling of the leaves as the wind swept over them.

Far off from her windows Pamela could see the beautiful Algerian mountains palely drawn against the southern sky. There was snow upon them at this season of the year, and they looked in the distance like fairy hills carven in ivory. Ralph had cut away the trees on that side of the house, so that Pamela could see a level plain stretching away as far as the forest that was spread out to the very foot of the mountains — a wide and empty plain of vineyards and cornfields, across which she could just discern the red clustered roofs of the village of the Five Fountains. But on the other three sides of the house the forest came up quite close to the terraced gardens, so that she could see into those green glades and hear the winter wind rustling in the tall eucalyptus trees and stirring the heavy fronds of the palms.

Ralph was very busy. The estate was a large one, and he had lately bought an additional tract of land which he intended to develop. He always worked very thoroughly and put his whole heart into any scheme that pleased him. When he was not out riding, visiting the farms and forests, he spent long hours in the library, reading, writing, interviewing overseers, attending to all the details of the estate. Thus Pamela was left a great deal to herself. After their morning ride together she seldom saw Ralph until luncheon time. The weather that January was unusually rough and cold, and there were many days when it was almost impossible to go out, and when her life at Djebl Anaba seemed both purposeless and dreary. There were days, too, when Ralph almost seemed to forget her presence. He came in to meals looking preoccu-

pied and perturbed, and he scarcely spoke to her. In those silent moods of his — so unlike anything she had known of him before their marriage — Pamela felt a little afraid of him. She wondered what disturbing thoughts were in his mind. She longed to ask him. Perhaps if he were worried about anything he might feel some relief in the telling of it. But she feared that he might think her nervous and fanciful, and she held her peace.

In those few first months at Djebl Anaba Pamela learned something of the bitter happiness which a great love can engender.

She knew that Ralph loved her, but it was with a selfish love that first isolated her and then in a measure neglected her. He seemed to forget her youth, and the fact that this very solitary life in Africa could hardly satisfy her. He expected her to settle down immediately to her new and unaccustomed life. And certainly Pamela was the last woman to rebel. She loved Ralph, and she had made up her mind before she married him that she would lead his life, fully aware that he was not at all like other men — the men of her own world. It was just that unusual individual quality about him which had at first fascinated her, so that she fell completely under the sway of his personality. There was something magnetic about him, a quality which almost always characterizes those men who are destined to be leaders of other men. It was not to be supposed that Pamela, who loved him, could be insensible to it. She could never say that she had not counted the cost before her marriage, had not realized that her future life would be essentially and radically different from any she had hitherto known. Mrs. Winton had elucidated this point to her, with remarkable clearness and a wealth of detail. But there were certain

things upon which she had not counted. She had not thought, for instance, that Ralph would throw himself into his work with such ardor that he seemed almost to forget that she was there, and, except for him, quite alone. It hurt her to watch this growing absorption, this apparent carelessness and neglect. He loved her in his jealous, possessive way, and she must learn to lead the life he preferred, to like solitude because he did. She belonged to him; she was his wife; he wished to have her here in this beautiful isolation. When weary of his work, he would sometimes lay aside book and pen, and seek her and kiss her and murmur the old words of love and tenderness. Pamela lived only for those moments. It was an unnatural, unreal existence for a woman not yet twenty, yet it blotted out all the past, and all that the past held of interest or pleasure. She would grow old at Djebl Anaba, hemmed in by forest and mountain that seemed to watch her with cynical pity, because she alone was young, and her youth was being slowly and surely wasted.

Morbid thoughts came to her sometimes, and these were the hardest to bear of all. They centered, as was inevitable, around her husband. She began to feel that a mystery surrounded him. He was a man with a secret, and haunted by that secret. He had secret ways. She discovered accidentally, and very much to her amazement, that Djebl Anaba was closely guarded. Six Kabyles, fully armed, watched by each of the two gates all through the night. The high, strong white walls that enclosed the house and gardens were crowned with fierce spikes that rendered it quite impossible for any one to climb over them. Within the house innumerable precautions were taken. The lower windows were crossed and re-crossed with heavy iron bars that

formed little squares such as are seen guarding the windows of Italian palaces. The passage to their own apartments on the first floor possessed two doors, an inner one and an outer one, which were always locked securely and bolted when they retired for the night When Pamela referred one day to this, Ralph only said, smiling:

"Algeria isn't London, my dear. And a man with a treasure sets a guard upon it."

He put his arm round her and kissed her. His dark eyes flamed as they rested upon her.

"But no one would want to harm us, surely?" she protested.

A very hard expression came into his face.

"I have lived too long, Pamela, to trust any one. You must let me guard my treasure in my own way!"

It flashed across her mind then that he was aware of some actual danger which menaced them. She longed to question him.

She said, with attempted indifference:

"Yet there are dangers which locked doors and spiked walls and Kabyle guards can't keep out!"

In an instant he loosened his hold of her and sprang to his feet, confronting her almost fiercely.

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" he said violently.

She had never seen his temper roused before. The sight terrified her. She could not speak, but sat there watching him with frightened eyes.

He caught her arm and said:

"*What* dangers? What do you mean? Tell me what you mean!"

"I was thinking of East Feddon," she said slowly; "of the evil spirits that surround us . . . that are seeking to devour us. Of the Watcher at the Gate. . . ."

"The Watcher at the Gate?" repeated Ralph.

His face was ghastly pale, with a kind of livid pallor.

"The Watcher at the Gate — at the gate of every soul. . . ." said Pamela.

Recovering himself with a great effort, Ralph said in a harsh, commanding, authoritative voice, that was quite robbed of all its customary softness and indolence:

"Pamela — I must ask you never to mention that again. If you do, I shall be exceedingly angry."

There was a note almost of desperation in his voice. She shrank a little before his fierce eyes, she felt that a threat lay behind those words.

She had the feeling that he was not only angry, but genuinely alarmed, as if some subtle fear had produced this sudden and passionate violence.

"I think you owe me this obedience," he said. "You know I am not exacting — I am not a tyrant. But in this — I am going to be obeyed. You must try to forget that East Feddon business. You are letting it influence you too much. It is not a wholesome nor a sane thing for you to be perpetually brooding over it."

At that moment he was her master, harsh, tyrannical, terrifying in this new and angry mood. She could see in him then the inexorable, pitiless leader who in the past had won his way through all obstacles. She was half fascinated by the very terror he evoked in her. Like many women, the touch of the iron hand was not disagreeable to her. His words thrilled her. She would have died for him then as a martyr dies at the stake for his cause.

And all the time something within her was saying:

"He has something to hide from you, that is why he is shutting the door and putting a guard upon

it. If you try to climb over the wall you will tear your hands with the spikes. You have come too near to the thing he would hide!"

When she looked up his fierce, almost resentful eyes were still fixed upon her.

"Of course, I will do as you say, Ralph," she said tranquilly; "I will try not to speak of it again. But I can't promise you not to think about it — I am alone too much to be able to control my thoughts. I have nothing to distract them. It is very lonely, is it not, at Djebl Anaba? Even you, with your work and occupation, must find it often very lonely. And I have so little to do. . . ."

She spoke gently, as if trying to soften him. She had aroused his anger so unintentionally. He seemed incapable of bearing the slightest allusion to East Feddon. And her reference to anything at once occult and evil seemed to inspire within him a curious dread.

He muttered under his breath: "Nothing can harm you — nothing can harm you." She did not think he had heard what she said, and she repeated, more distinctly:

"For it is very lonely for me, Ralph. Dull and lonely while you are so busy. I am not used to this kind of life — away from all my friends."

"And I am not enough, Pamela?" he said taking her hand. With a touch of remorse, he noticed that she was looking pale and fragile.

"Sometimes I hardly see you all day, Ralph. I have no one to speak to except Célestine. And often I have such a longing to talk to another woman."

She added, with a kind of desperation:

"I feel as if those mountains — those great forests — were imprisoning me!"

"Don't you care about reading, Pamela? I always thought you did. If you had some occupation. . . ." He looked at her wistfully. "Why, we haven't been here six weeks. You're not tired of it already?"

"Your books don't interest me," she said.

"But you can send to Paris or London for any you like. Do make a list — it shall be posted today. I want you to be happy here — happy and occupied."

"Thank you, Ralph," she said. But even as she uttered the words she felt how little he understood her. It was her youth that was in revolt against the life he had thus imposed upon her.

"You mustn't mope, you know," he said. "Why don't you go for a walk this afternoon? Make Célestine go with you."

He wondered if she had enough exercise and fresh air.

"It's a beautiful day. I would come with you myself, but I must ride up to the quarries." He bent his head and kissed her.

It was soon after two o'clock when Pamela, in compliance with Ralph's suggestion, started out for a walk with Célestine. The afternoon was beautifully fine, though some clouds had grouped themselves low above the hills to the north, presaging rain, perhaps, in the near future.

She wished Ralph had been able to accompany her. She was a little tired of the society of Célestine, who was somewhat discontented with her life at Djebl Anaba. It seemed useless, she thought, for Madame to have a maid, when she seldom wore any of her pretty trousseau frocks, and even if she had done so there was no one there to see them except her husband, upon whom such things were evidently wasted.

Célestine was not a particularly good walker, and the country did not attract her.

So when Pamela said: "I want to go for a long walk," she only responded in a dispirited tone:

"In which direction, Madame?"

Pamela had not thought of that.

"Oh, I suppose to the Five Fountains. We could buy some stamps, or picture postcards, if there are any."

She wished to make closer acquaintance with the little Arab village, which she had only passed through sometimes in the motor.

"The other ways through the forest are rather lonely," she added.

"Yes, Madame," agreed Célestine.

They started out across the plain, soon leaving the high white walls of Djebl Anaba behind them. The road ran almost straight across the plain to Aïn-Khramsa, between the two rows of acacias, whose pale and dusty branches were still bare of leaves. Great hedges of gray prickly-pear interspersed with bramble bushes divided the fields from the road. In some of the fields the winter wheat was of quite respectable growth.

They could see quite plainly the little village with its red roofs and white buildings set in groves of palm trees. It lay less than two miles away. Still Célestine did not enjoy the prospect of a walk of nearly four miles. There was an expression of patient resignation on her little, dark, discontented face.

Further on they skirted a tract of forest, of which the enticing verdure attracted Pamela, who was beginning to weary of the hard, dusty road. Its sudden appeal was not lost upon her. She turned to the maid.

"I think we will follow that path through the

forest for a little way. It looks so nice and green. I am sure there must be a short cut to the village — we should save all that long corner."

The Frenchwoman set her lips.

"But the forest — Madame — it is so lonely, and there are wild beasts!"

"Oh, not here, so close to the village," said Pamela eagerly.

She walked a few steps along the path. A little further on the turf was carpeted with daisies and wild pink cyclamen. Pamela in delight stooped to gather the flowers.

Célestine followed her reluctantly. She glanced nervously from left to right, as if she feared that some wild beast was hiding there behind the thick brushwood, waiting to pounce upon her and devour her.

Pamela went ahead gaily, quite oblivious of the incipient mutiny of Célestine. The fresh air and bright sunshine had revived her, and her morning discontent had vanished. She was even a little sorry that she had disclosed it to Ralph. She did not want him to think that she was not perfectly happy at Djebl Anaba. She wished now that she had kept silence. She stepped briskly on, and Célestine had some difficulty in keeping pace with her.

Neither of them noticed the sudden darkening of the sky. They had followed the little path for a considerable distance, but it was now almost completely lost in the tangle of brushwood. Pamela continued to push her way through resolutely, but the bushes grew still more closely together, and now the path was no longer discernible. All around her there was silence and a deep, almost apprehensive gloom. She could scarcely see the sky through the heavy, branching trees. When she did look up she could see only a patch that was

quite black, with the lurid and menacing blackness that often foretells a thunderstorm. It had been as clear and blue as a sapphire when they started.

She made some trivial remark to Célestine, and was surprised to receive no answer. She looked round quickly. There was no one in sight. . . .

"Célestine!" she cried.

The maid had evidently lagged behind. At any rate, she did not answer.

"Célestine! Célestine!" Pamela called still louder this time.

She thought she heard a very faint answer, which sounded a long way off, but she was not perfectly certain that it was not the echo of her own voice. She turned and began to retrace her steps. As she did so, a large drop of rain splashed in her face. It made her start. Other drops fell on her coat, on her sleeves. The wind blew roughly, sweeping through the forest ways, whistling shrilly in the trees. A distant growl of thunder added to the desolation of the scene.

Pamela could not find the path by which she had come. She searched vainly for it, pushing her way through the brushwood first in one direction, then in another. Again she called to Célestine, and this time, assured that she had heard a faint answer, she tried to go in the direction from which she thought the sound had come.

After a few minutes' breathless search, she came upon a little open space. Sitting upon the trunk of a fallen cork tree she discovered Célestine, weeping bitterly.

"Ah — ah — I thought Madame was lost — lost in the storm."

"Why did you not follow me?" said Pamela sharply.

"Madame went too quickly — and I twisted my

ankle," moaned Célestine, whose courage had now utterly deserted her.

Pamela began to feel uneasy. She had no idea where she was, and this frightened, weeping woman was hardly in a condition to help her.

"What nonsense!" she said briskly; "you will get drenched through, sitting there. Please get up and come as fast as you can. If there is going to be a bad thunderstorm, I do not want to be here under these trees."

"But Madame does not know the way. This forest goes for twenty miles between Aïn-Khramsa and the sea. It is not safe . . . it belongs to the Arabs . . . it belongs to Sidi Aziz. . . ."

"How do you know that, Célestine?"

"André told me." (André was the chauffeur.)

"But you can not stay here, Célestine. Whether we are lost or not we can not remain here — we should be out all night. You know how quickly it gets dark here."

The presence of this terror-stricken woman seemed to fortify Pamela and give her increased courage. But the situation was not an agreeable one. The rain was now falling heavily and the icy wind blew with increasing force. Célestine rose stiffly and drying her eyes, followed Pamela with commendable meekness.

"Why — look at that tunnel in the rocks!" said Pamela suddenly.

The grassy space had widened out, and great masses of rock whose gray surfaces were enameled with golden lichens rose in all directions. On one side they formed a kind of little tunnel, high enough to admit a man, and Pamela, entering it to take shelter from the storm, found herself at the edge of a kind of cave, with roughly cut steps leading down into a somber and unrelieved darkness.

"Oh, Célestine, I wonder where it leads to? Do stand inside and you won't get so wet. Look — it is just like Alice in Wonderland!"

They stood side by side within the tunnel, for outside the storm was now raging fiercely. The fiery tongues of the lightning seemed to split the black bank of cloud, tearing it asunder. The thunder roared, circling around the mountains, and finally giving a tremendous reverberating peal which startled Célestine into an access of fresh weeping. The frightened cheep of a bird sounded as if in feeble protest.

Pamela moved cautiously down the first few steps.

"It isn't quite dark," she called back. "I can see something shining down there."

Her slight form was swallowed up now in the darkness of the cavern. As she vanished Célestine's tears flowed afresh. She did not love an adventure, and, after all, were they not lost in the pathless forests of Aïn-Khramsa?

"Célestine!"

This time it seemed to her that Pamela's voice came from the heart of the earth. It echoed desolately, as if through vast hollow spaces of emptiness, and had an eerie sound, almost as if it had come from another world. Those echoes were ghostly, as if millions of mocking elfin voices had seized upon the cry and repeated it with malicious persistence. How could Madame remain in such a savage country? How could she go thus unprotected down into a black cave? How could she expect Célestine to accompany her on her mad adventures? . . . Even her devotion to her young mistress could not stand this great test. André had told her how fierce and savage the Arabs were. And if an Arab came upon them now. . . .

As she looked up, disturbed perhaps by the sound

of a coming footstep as it trod on the fallen leaves, it seemed to her as if her very terror had materialized, for there, approaching her slowly, was a magnificent Arab, stately, majestic. and turbaned. She choked back a scream and clutched her hands tightly together.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in French.

The voice reassured her. He was not a common Arab — this tall man in his long blue burnous fastened across his shoulders.

"I am waiting for Madame — for Madame Mellish. She has gone down there ——" She pointed toward the steps that descended from the black mouth of the cavern.

"Gone down there? Without a lantern?" said Aziz in amazement. "Is she alone?"

"She is alone — she has no lantern," said Célestine. "I had not the courage to go with her. We took refuge here from the storm — we had lost our way."

"Don't be so frightened," he said. "I will go down and bring her back. I am Sidi Aziz, and I know M. Mellish very well. I do not think he would like Madame to go down there alone. There is a subterranean lake there of unknown depth."

Pushing past her, he entered the cave.

There were not many steps, and as he descended he could dimly discern a woman's figure standing by the edge of the black, motionless water.

"Madame ——" he said.

His voice startled her. She turned quickly and saw outlined against the horseshoe-shaped space of light enclosed by the entrance a tall, turbaned figure. . . . The white turban glimmered curiously in the dusk.

Pamela gave a shrill and sustained scream that

sent its echoes pealing through the immense and hollow cavern. She gave a sharp movement backwards, and in another moment would have fallen into the deep, unmeasured waters of the pool had not Aziz flung himself lightly down the steps and seized her by the arm. She made an effort to free herself from his grasp, but he held her in a grip of iron. Then, lifting her in his arms, he carried her into the open air.

Pamela stood there trembling like an aspen leaf. Her face was as white as death.

"You frightened me ——" she said. "I did not see who it was. It was so dark down there."

Aziz looked at her curiously. Yes, she was very beautiful, this young wife of Mr. Mellish; he wondered that she should be permitted to wander so far into the forest with only a woman in attendance upon her.

"I did not know that it was you, Sidi Aziz," she said; "I have heard my husband speak of you." She tried to control her voice, but it was not quite steady. She seemed to be back again in the little room at East Feddon, crying and clinging to Billy, while he fought for her with those unknown and powerful forces summoned thither by Professor Scudamore.

"Mr. Mellish should have warned you not to come into this part of the forest. He should have told you not to enter the cave, especially without a lantern."

"He never mentioned it to me — I don't suppose he knows it is here," she said.

The Arab smiled faintly.

"Mr. Mellish knows the forest very thoroughly — it is impossible that he should not be aware of the existence of this cave," he said politely.

He realized that Mellish could not have told the story of the tragedy to his young wife. Perhaps it was as well — she was too young to know the details of that sad and tragic crime.

"Madame will perhaps accept a seat in my car? You are a long way from home and it is still raining."

Pamela thanked him. She and Célestine followed him down to a path that led immediately to the high road. She was a little surprised to find that they had been so near to the road all the time. Like all lost people, they had wandered in a circle. It was her cry to Célestine which had perhaps reached the ears of Aziz as he went past and attracted him to the spot.

Aziz drove the car himself and the chauffeur sat beside him in front. Pamela and Célestine were together inside. It was a large and very luxurious motor and it traveled swiftly across the plain.

When they arrived at Djebl Anaba they found Ralph standing at the door, looking anxious and perturbed.

"I met Madame on my way to Aïn-Khramsa," said Aziz as he alighted, "and as it was so wet I begged her to accept a lift."

"It was very kind of you — I was beginning to get anxious about her. The storm has been frightful," said Ralph. "My dear, why did you go so far?"

"I — I lost the way," said Pamela, nervously. She wondered why Aziz had made no mention of the cave.

With only a slight bow of farewell, Aziz got back into the car and drove swiftly away. The great red motor was soon lost to sight in the gathering dusk as it sped along the road toward Aïn-Khramsa.

CHAPTER XVI

"I AM sorry you went so far and that you had to accept a lift from Aziz," Ralph said at dinner that night. "I suppose you could not very well help it?"

"No — it was raining so heavily, and the thunderstorm was at its worst when he met us. I could not well refuse," said Pamela.

She did not mention her adventure in the cave. She felt that Ralph would be annoyed if she told him of her intense fear, which she had not tried to conceal, and which had almost made her fling herself into the lake to escape from Aziz. It would recall that subject which earlier in the day he had so authoritatively forbidden her to mention — the episode at East Feddon. It was the second time Aziz had terrified her in this way, and she felt that she had not been very polite to him.

Even when he seized her in his arms to save her from those deep and cold waters she had struggled to free herself. She had not in the least disguised her terror of him. She felt a little ashamed of the incident, and thought for the present she would not mention it to Ralph.

Yet Ralph knew that the cave was there, and she wondered why he had never mentioned its existence to her, even if it had only been to warn her not to venture into it without a lantern, owing to the deep subterranean lake which lay concealed there.

"I had a letter from Lady Saltmarshe to-day," she said, anxious to change the subject; "she and her husband are to arrive in Algiers next week, and when they have been there a little while they

intend to make some long motoring expeditions. I should like to ask them to come and stay here, if you have no objection, Ralph."

Even before she said the words, she felt that the proposal would not meet with his approval.

"Who is Lady Saltmarshe?" he said in surprise. "I mean — is she a very intimate friend of yours?"

"Not exactly intimate — but I knew her before she was married. And I like her — I should like to have her here. He is nice, too."

"I hate visitors in the house," said Ralph. "They always create a disturbance. Do you really want to see them so much?"

"Yes," said Pamela, "I should enjoy having them. They wouldn't stay very long, Ralph. I don't suppose you understand — but I never see another woman to speak to except Célestine."

"Oh, well, you can ask them to come for a week, if you like," said Ralph. "They won't want to stay forever, will they? I am sure I don't know what we shall do with them."

He wondered if Lady Saltmarshe would pity Pamela, and perhaps make her genuinely discontented with her lot.

He was afraid that his wife was already growing weary of the solitude and peace of Djebl Anaba.

"Are they young?" he asked.

"Yes; she is twenty, and he is about twenty-five," said Pamela. "They have only been married about eighteen months. I am sure you will like them, Ralph."

After dinner she sat down and wrote the invitation to Lady Saltmarshe. She did not wish to risk any delay in the matter, for she was afraid that Ralph might reconsider his decision, and refuse to allow her to invite them. He had evidently been

little pleased at the prospect, and had only given in because she wished to have them so much. And she wanted intensely to see Lady Saltmarshe again. Indeed, she would have welcomed almost any young and sympathetic woman. She hoped Ralph would not remember that they had been at East Feddon in the autumn at the time of the fateful séance. She felt reluctant to mention East Feddon to him, since any reference to it seemed to arouse his anger.

Ralph was beginning to be more and more of an enigma to her. She felt that she knew really very little about him; his thoughts, his real tastes, his idiosyncrasies were almost unknown to her. And it was not easy to learn anything more about him. If he disliked anything he would probably tell her, as he had done that morning, with a display of almost violent anger. It was not a suave method of teaching her, and she felt that it would in the end destroy her own frankness and create an atmosphere of reserve and constraint between them.

When they were together, and Ralph was not either anxious or preoccupied, he would talk a great deal, and, like all great talkers, he gave a surface impression of frankness. But nearly always his conversation was quite objective. He spoke of the affairs of Djebl Anaba, of the quarries, the vines, the crops, the state of the forests. He was immensely interested in all that concerned these things, and he evoked a certain interest in Pamela. But that there was another Ralph who was not frank at all she was beginning reluctantly to perceive. He was a mystery she could not pierce. Sometimes he seemed to her like a man who had passed through some tremendous and vital experience which he had kept forever in his heart as a closely guarded secret. What that experience was she could not hazard any conjecture. But she felt its existence like some

invisible and dividing barrier. Since coming to Africa it had, however, assumed in her mind a connection with her own solitary experience of evil — an unexplained yet definitely menacing evil — which had actually touched her with intent to harm her at East Feddon. She had even felt that by elucidating this she would have automatically attained to the possession of some clue to Ralph's secret. Sometimes she was obsessed by the desire so to elucidate it; as if her very happiness depended upon it. She felt that until she knew it she would never know the real Ralph.

She remembered how, for a few days, that incident at East Feddon had changed her whole outlook. It had, so to speak, swept her off her feet, loosing her from all her moorings, and sending her unspeakably and desolately adrift from all things that had formerly been dear and secure. It had estranged her even from Ralph, making her actually doubt her own love for him. Her attitude toward him had been antagonistic and even hostile.

Yes . . . she had come near to hating him. And then, as he won her back, little by little, patiently, obstinately, she had found herself loving him more deeply than ever before, and even perhaps more unreasonably. To please him, she had hastened the day of their wedding. Those intervening weeks seemed now in retrospect rather blurred and indistinct. She had not seemed quite normal, quite like herself. She had been capricious, nervous, changeable, complicated. Not even in retrospect did she seem to have been very happy. She had felt disturbed and restless, wishing for Ralph when he was not there, yet desiring only to be quite alone whenever he chanced to come and see her. Yet she had never dreamed of retracting

her promise after that day when he had offered her her freedom. That had brought her suddenly into contact with reality. Ralph had staked all on that one bold throw, but he had seen the absolute necessity of it. She must know her own mind. From that day of their reconciliation they had seemed to belong to each other utterly. There could be no going back. She was his timid but adoring slave. She had no more doubts. . . . And even now she did not doubt. The solitude and loneliness might press heavily at times, but she would not alter anything unless Ralph wished to alter it.

When the letter to Lady Saltmarshe was written and sent by the *courrier,* whose daily coming and going often formed the sole incident of the twenty-four hours, Pamela felt a little nervous as to the wisdom of her action. It would be almost impossible for the visit to pass off without some casual allusion to East Feddon, perhaps even without some direct reference to the Blairs, to Father Benedict and Professor Scudamore. It was quite possible that by this time even the Saltmarshes were in possession of the facts which had led to that sudden and amazing rupture between Mrs. Blair and Rupert. She resolved, if she had an opportunity, to beg Lady Saltmarshe not to refer to the matter in front of Ralph. She did not wish her visitors to witness one of his sudden and uncontrolled outbursts of anger. He was not a bad-tempered man, and she did not wish them to form a wrong and prejudiced opinion of him.

A few days later she received a telegram of delighted acceptance from Lady Saltmarshe, who said, however, that they had been obliged to postpone their trip to Algeria for a few weeks, and it was impossible that they could arrive before the end

of March. She was a little disappointed at this, but when she told Ralph an expression almost of pleasure lightened his face.

"Perhaps they won't come, after all," he said; "they seem very changeable!"

They had just come in from a ride in the forest when Pamela received the telegram. It was a beautiful day toward the end of February and there was a feeling of spring in the air. All the glades were vividly green after the recent winter rains, and everywhere the wild flowers were beginning to blossom gayly.

"Aziz is coming to see me this morning," said Ralph, "we shall be in the library, so perhaps you had better not come there."

Although his former intercourse with the Arab had been friendly and even intimate, he did not think it desirable that Pamela should see him when he came.

Pamela was looking out of her window when the Arab rode up to the house. He rode well, with that careless, practised ease of a man accustomed to horses from his earliest youth. As he dismounted he drew himself up to his full height, and stood there an arrogant, imposing figure, wrapped in the graceful folds of his dark burnous. He was handsome in an unpleasing way, with his fair yet dusky skin, and clear gray eyes and neat, straw-colored beard. For an Arab he was unusually fair. Suddenly he looked up and his eyes met Pamela's, and he regarded her for a moment with a bright, almost piercing scrutiny. She drew back instinctively into the shadow of the curtain, feeling a little guilty and ashamed that he should have seen her watching him. Then a kind of blind, reasonless terror seized her; her limbs trembled; she tottered back into the room and almost fell upon the low divan. She

could not tell why it was, but the very sight of Aziz agitated her and recalled to her that night at East Feddon. He seemed to surround her, as it were, with that evil atmosphere, to renew the presence of those powerful, indeterminate, yet objective forces which had been evoked by Professor Scudamore. She uttered a faint, strangled cry and hid her face in the cushions.

She tried to reason with herself, accusing herself that far from being malignant in his attitude toward her, Aziz was ready to show her that friendliness he had always shown to her husband. Had he not sprung down the steps to save her from the deep waters of the lake? Had he not driven her home, cold and drenched, in his car? But the feeling of aversion was too strong for her. She hated to think he was there in the library talking to Ralph. . . .

At last she rose and washed her face in cold water, sponging her temples. She felt overcome, a little hysterical. She sobbed in a nervous, uncontrolled way, as a frightened child sobs. She longed to call Ralph; she felt that his voice would reassure her. Even if he were angry, she felt that his anger would be easier to bear than this blind, reasonless terror that was overpowering her. . . . Why was it that she mistrusted Aziz? Why did she think of him as an enemy rather than as a friend? He was alone with Ralph, and she felt as if something evil were actually menacing her husband. Was it because his face was so extraordinarily like the one of which she had caught a glimpse in the obscurity of the Professor's room at East Feddon?

Almost without thinking, so great was her longing to go to her husband and assure herself of his safety, she slipped out of the room and ran swiftly

down the long corridor and up the flight of stairs that led to the library. She never paused, but flinging open the door, burst into the room.

Ralph rose in surprise. Aziz rose, too, staring at her with the fixed and steady gaze of the Oriental.

Her face was still reddened with the tears and that hasty application of cold water. Her hair, generally so neat, was in disorder; her blouse was open at the throat, though she was not aware that she had unfastened it. Her appearance was extremely disheveled, and for the moment all her beauty seemed to have vanished.

Ralph came forward, and, taking her arm, led her quite gently from the room. He shut the door, and stood looking at her in bewilderment.

"My dear — did you forget? I asked you not to disturb me this morning, as I was expecting Aziz."

"I didn't forget . . . I knew he was here," she stammered.

"Why are you so untidy and disheveled?" he asked sternly; "what on earth is the matter, Pamela?"

His words seemed to bring her back to a saner realization of things.

"I am sorry, Ralph. I wanted you. Something frightened me. . . ."

"Frightened you? What is there to frighten you?"

His slow, soft voice held a note of irony.

"I think it was Aziz. I saw him come. He looked at me!"

"Looked at you? My dear — don't you see how nervous and foolish you are? Do go back to your room and get Célestine to do your hair. What is the matter with you?"

She felt that he was exasperated by her outburst of foolishness.

"Aziz frightened me," she repeated, almost against her will.

"My dear Pamela, you must really learn self-control, or you will let your nerves get the better of you. Now I can't stop with you. I must go back to Aziz." He stooped and kissed her.

When he had gone back into the library and had closed the door Pamela, almost blinded with tears, groped her way back along the corridor and went to her own room. But she did not ring for Célestine. She felt still too agitated. For nearly an hour she sat upon the divan in a crouching attitude, huddled together like an old woman. . . .

Yes — the place seemed to her to be haunted — haunted with those mysterious forces of evil that had menaced her at East Feddon. She could not go on living here — unless Ralph would explain. . . .

Explain? He would laugh at her fears, perhaps he would be angry and scathing — but she knew that he would never explain.

When luncheon time came, she was ashamed that Ralph should see her red and swollen eyes, so she rang for Célestine and told her that she would have lunch in her own room. She felt thoroughly upset and disinclined to eat. The maid looked at her rather curiously. What had happened? Had the two been quarreling? No — that was hardly likely, since M. Mellish had spent the whole morning in the library with Sidi Aziz, who had only just ridden away.

It was about two o'clock when Ralph came into the room and found Pamela lying pale and exhausted upon the divan. The rose-colored curtains

were swaying slightly in the wind, for the windows were both open, and the sun was streaming into the room.

He came slowly toward her.

"I hope you have had some lunch," he said, in a voice that sounded stern through all its softness.

"Yes," she said. "I — I had some soup. I was not feeling very hungry."

"Why did you disregard my request, Pamela? Surely it was a very simple thing to ask you not to come into the library this morning, as I was expecting Aziz?"

"I came — because I was frightened. Something frightened me — I couldn't stay here alone."

"Why should Aziz frighten you?" he asked.

How could she tell him? The very mention of East Feddon had been sternly tabooed. She was silent, conscious that his great, dark eyes were fixed upon her with a curious scrutiny.

He saw that her eyes were still red and swollen, as if she had indulged in a prolonged fit of weeping. Her hands were strained tightly together, as if she were only now controlling herself with a great effort. Pamela had the long and thin hands of the tall, slenderly built woman; they were very pretty, attractive hands, delicate and fragile and colored like a sea-shell. Ralph was proud of his wife's hands.

"Well?" he said with a touch of exasperation. "are you not going to tell me why Aziz should frighten you?"

"I can not explain — I hardly know. But there is something about this place which frightens me. It is not only Aziz — it is the feeling that Djebl Anaba is an evil place — that wicked things have happened here. Don't you ever feel it yourself, Ralph?"

It could not have been her fancy that, as she uttered these words, a curious change came over his face, which was of an ashen pallor.

"I was afraid to come this morning, because you had asked me not to," said Pamela, in a kind of desperation; "but I was more afraid to remain here alone. . . ."

"My dear Pamela — you mustn't let your nerves get the better of you in this way — it will never do, and you will make yourself quite ill. Nothing of the sort has ever happened in this house. I've lived here myself for more than seven years, and before then it had been empty for I don't know how long!"

As he spoke, Pamela became aware through some subtle intuitive process that Ralph was not speaking the truth. She felt convinced that he had given this evasive answer because he was in possession of some knowledge which, for a reason best known to himself, he desired to keep from her.

She was aware, too, that her words had startled him, and that he was endeavoring to conceal the fact from her by a certain careless irritability.

"I suppose — I am unusually sensitive to atmosphere," she went on, more tranquilly; "but I have had this feeling about Djebl Anaba for some time past — almost ever since I first came here!"

"Just now," he reminded her coldly; "you told me that Aziz frightened you. What has Aziz got to do with Djebl Anaba?"

"I don't know," she said; "I have only seen him three times, and he has always made me ill with terror. I can not explain it. But he accentuates the atmosphere — he makes all the horror seem more — more alive."

As she said these words, she fixed her eyes, wide with fear and apprehension, upon her husband.

Again she saw that peculiar look, as of one withdrawing into himself, hiding behind an iron-controlled exterior; it was as if he had said aloud: *"You shall not know . . . you shall not know. . . ."*

But the voice that spoke was oddly expressionless.

"My dear Pamela — you are very unreasonable about it all. You must see that I can not possibly prevent Aziz from coming here. He is a very intimate friend of mine, and he has always been in the habit of consulting me about his affairs. It would offend him very much if I asked him to cease his visits. The Arabs are very proud, and if one offends them they are apt to be vindictive and revengeful. As he is such a near neighbor, you will perhaps admit the necessity of my remaining on good terms with him. I assure you, there is nothing about him to inspire you with these nervous fears. And as for there being an evil atmosphere about Djebl Anaba, I am afraid that is only another way of telling me that you hate the place and are already sick of it and wish to go away?"

"No — I didn't mean that. I do want to be happy here."

"Well, it oughtn't to be so difficult," he said, smiling.

He went slowly out of the room. Pamela choked back the tears and hid her face once more in the cushions. Her eyes burned and smarted and her head ached from that prolonged fit of crying. At that moment her courage seemed to forsake her. She thought of the long years she would have to spend at Djebl Anaba — years of most precious youth that could never be recalled — because its isolation and solitude appealed so strongly to Ralph. There was absolutely no necessity for him to live thus in the heart of the African forests, away from

all her own people. He had a large, independent fortune, and could have made his home wherever he chose. But he had chosen this life in preference to all others because he liked it, and because, too, he was weary of the turmoil of cities, of the noise and rush, of the complications of social life, its narrow, exacting etiquette and conventions. He liked the freedom and solitude, and he was determined to impose them upon her also. She would grow old here; day by day her prettiness would fade; her face would change and become dull and haggard, and perhaps in time her love for him would die, and she would learn to hate the man who had thrust this fate upon her. She was a prisoner here — in the heart of the African forest. There would be no escape unless she died. She loved Ralph, and she had made the first surrender willingly enough. Yet she told herself that she had not been fully aware of all that it entailed of sacrifice and surrender. It was putting love to too great a test. And now there had crept in this new factor to complicate the situation still further. She was dominated by fear. Fear of Djebl Anaba, fear of Aziz, and, in a lesser degree, fear of Ralph and of the thing which she guessed rather than knew he was hiding from her. She had come into an atmosphere of mystery, as if she had suddenly been surrounded by strange, deep shadows, that suggested even while they concealed intolerable secrets. The forests, the wide, remote, echoing house, with its high prison walls, its Kabyle guard, its locked and bolted doors, its gliding Arab servants, the arrogant form of Aziz, who came and went as he chose with a kind of insolent familiarity — all these things seemed to have become suddenly hostile and menacing, crystallizing her formless terror. And it was a thing about which she dared not speak openly to Ralph. Its

roots lay far back in that night at East Feddon, which he refused angrily to discuss. He was violently irritated whenever she let any mention of it escape her. . . . She saw now that it was a thing which was capable of alienating and estranging her from Ralph. It was something that might ultimately come between them, destroying, or at least impairing, their happiness. Already it had on more than one occasion brought them to the verge of serious quarreling. She was more than ever convinced that he had some strong motive for silencing her fears. He might pooh-pooh them, put them down to uncontrolled nerves, but at heart she knew that he had some deeper reason for his harshness. A reason that he was determined to hide from her.

But in writing home — which she did with great regularity — she never made the slightest allusion to these things to Mrs. Winton. She did not want her mother to think that her marriage had proved anything but a complete success.

CHAPTER XVII

THE Saltmarshes arrived rather late on a cold and wet evening toward the end of March. The motor had been sent to St. Augustin to meet them, as they had signified their intention of coming by train to that station.

The train had, however, been late, the motor had broken down with a punctured tire, and by the time they arrived Lady Saltmarshe looked almost blue with cold and as nearly plain as it was possible for her to look.

"My dear Pamela — what a heavenly fire! We are simply frozen," she exclaimed, embracing her warmly.

Pamela introduced her husband.

"I'm sorry you had so many disasters," she said, smiling. "Do sit down and have some tea."

She suddenly remembered that this was the very first time she had entertained visitors in her own house since her marriage.

"We have been simply longing to see Djebl Anaba," Lady Saltmarshe continued, "we heard so much about it in Algiers." She turned and smiled prettily at Ralph. "It is quite celebrated, you know," she added, with the eager desire to please of the supremely happy.

Ralph looked at her with an unmoved, unsmiling face.

"Really?" he said. "I had no idea of that. I only hope you won't be disappointed. I am sure Pamela will tell you how dull it is. We are quite out of the world here."

"But that is such a delicious change after London and Paris," said Lady Saltmarshe. "When one lives always in cities, I think one prefers a remote place for the holidays."

"It is a long time since I have lived in cities," said Ralph Mellish.

Lady Saltmarshe turned to Pamela.

"You must come and pay us a return visit in Rome," she said, "when you get tired of your solitudes. You know we are to go to Rome almost at once. I am so looking forward to it."

"Oh, I should love that," said Pamela eagerly. "I adore Rome."

She turned with shining eyes to her husband. But Ralph, though coldly polite, was not in a mood for genial enthusiasm.

"I want Pamela to learn to love the solitudes, too," he said. "I want her *to* prefer it — as I do — to the life of cities."

"I can't bear being a single day alone," said Lady Saltmarshe, "and no more can Cecil, in his heart of hearts."

Lord Saltmarshe, thus appealed to, smiled with easy indulgence upon his wife.

"You're not frightfully flattering to me, Nina," he said, in his drawling, good-natured voice, that had a very agreeable timbre.

He made a strong contrast to Ralph, being of the type of very *soigné* diplomatist. In appearance, he was small and fair and rather delicate-looking, and had a slightly boyish appearance. Beside Ralph indeed he looked almost a boy.

He and his wife were comrades, of the same generation, almost of the same age. Pamela thought they looked almost like two children, happy and good-humored, who would probably quarrel and then kiss and make friends and resume their play. Both were simple and frank.

Whereas she and Ralph. . . .

She who had been Ralph's wife for nearly four months knew nothing of the deep and secret thoughts that lay behind those great dark eyes. And their very quarreling seemed to touch the deep heart of things so that it estranged them; so fierce and wounding and ineradicable were the sores it left. She felt inclined to envy the simple, uncomplicated lot of little Lady Saltmarshe.

When tea was over, she took her along the corridor to her room. A sudden terror had seized her lest an inadvertent mention should be made of East Feddon. She thought if the name were spoken she should scream, so overwrought were her nerves.

Lady Saltmarshe followed her. When they reached the immense and spacious apartments which comprised the guest-chambers at Djebl Anaba they found Lady Saltmarshe's maid already there

unpacking the trunks. A soft dress of palest ivory satin lay outspread on the bed.

Pamela said in a low voice:

"Have you heard anything of Mrs. Blair and Rupert?"

"Oh, my dear, don't you know? It is a long story — I'd better tell you at dinner," said Lady Saltmarshe.

She removed her hat and examined her face attentively in the glass.

"No — don't tell me at dinner, please," said Pamela. "I'll explain why afterward." Then, with an effort, she said: "Please don't mention East Feddon in front of Ralph."

It was impossible to add any reason for this apparently strange request. But Lady Saltmarshe was a woman of the world, and she knew better than to ask for reasons. She only smiled and said: "Of course I won't, Pamela. And I'll tell Cecil not to."

She had taken Ralph's measure, and had come to the conclusion that he would not be so easy to manage as some men — as Cecil, for example. She wondered if there were many subjects Pamela did not mention in front of him.

Her presence had cheered Pamela, to whom it had brought back something of the gay, wholesome, pleasant atmosphere of her old life — frank, free, straightforward, and uncomplicated, with nothing hidden or mysterious that demanded intrigue or silence. She had hated making this request, but Lady Saltmarshe had accepted it without either hesitation or curiosity. She seemed to dispel that oddly morbid atmosphere which had surrounded Pamela almost ever since she had come to Djebl Anaba, and to re-create the old pleasant suavity of the life she had left in London.

"I believe I am getting quite *farouche,*" she thought bitterly as she went to her room. She envied her friend's easy, spontaneous gaiety, her charming manner.

As she stood in front of the glass while Célestine put the finishing touches to her toilette, Ralph came into the room.

He looked at his wife with some pride. She wore white, with touches of gold that suited her splendid hair and gave her an almost regal look. Her arms and neck were bare. She was like a queen in her stately grace, so dignified, so ungirlish.

When Célestine had gone he said:

"You didn't prepare me for such an empty-headed little doll. And I hope he will put off some of his diplomatic swagger while he is here. It doesn't suit the simplicity of Djebl Anaba."

Simplicity? She started at the word.

"Oh, I hoped you would like them, Ralph," she said.

"I don't like or dislike them. They are your friends and you were very anxious to have them, though I can't think how you will amuse them. I hope they won't make you still more discontented with your lot!"

But the very presence of the Saltmarshes had given Pamela a new courage; had chased away for the time being those morbid fears of hers.

"I am not discontented, Ralph," she said coldly. "But I like having people here — it makes a change. I have been alone a great deal all the winter — it makes me fell dull and — and ——" She hesitated.

"And ——?" said Ralph.

"And nervous," said Pamela. "You see, I've never been much alone up till now. Some people prefer solitude — but I don't think I do."

"You will learn to like it," he said. "You will learn to like the peace of it. You are too young to know how malicious the world can be; how much better it is to live out of it — away from it."

"I lived in a kind world," said Pamela coldly, "among kind, indulgent people."

She played in an idle manner with some trinkets that lay on the dressing-table, twisting a fine gold chain in and out of her fingers. It betrayed her nervousness, her preoccupation with other thoughts.

"Please put that down, Pamela, and listen to me," said Ralph, in his soft, languid voice that was yet so peremptory, so authoritative.

He spoke as if he were speaking to a child that was inclined to be troublesome and disobedient.

Pamela put down the chain and looked gravely at her husband.

"What is it, Ralph?" she asked.

"You have told me once or twice," he said slowly, and keeping his eyes fixed steadily upon her, "that you have had nervous terrors since you came here — terrors about the place, about Aziz and so forth. Now I don't want you to mention anything of the kind to your friends. Do you understand, Pamela?"

"Yes; I understand."

"You won't mention it — at all — in any sort of way?"

She hesitated. She had been longing to confide her fears to some kind and sympathetic woman who would help her to overcome them, who would point out how morbid and unwholesome such fears must necessarily be. She had looked forward quite eagerly to telling Lady Saltmarshe — to asking her advice."

Ralph became impatient.

"Why don't you answer, Pamela?" he said rather abruptly.

"I don't want to make that promise," she said slowly.

"You mean — you wish to discuss the matter with Lady Saltmarshe?" he asked.

"Yes — I should like to tell her. . . ."

His face hardened.

"You still have them — these fears?"

"Yes," she said.

"But you don't speak of them any more?"

"I saw it vexed you. I tried to keep them to myself."

"I am going to forbid you to mention the subject to Lady Saltmarshe," he said slowly.

"Yes?" said Pamela.

"Of course, I can not enforce your obedience. But if you disregard my wishes ——"

"What will happen then?" said Pamela.

"I shall punish you by not allowing you to have any more visitors here," he answered.

"I don't think we shall be troubled with visitors," she said, rather obstinately. "We live too far off the beaten track. The English only go to well-known places — Constantine — Biskra — Tunis. . . ."

"That is quite beside the point. Are you going to obey me?"

"Ralph, why do you talk of obeying and punishment? I'm not a child any more."

"You are my wife. And you are very young. You require — guiding."

His words made her feel violently rebellious. She resented being treated like a child. Yet if he chose to exert his authority in the matter, she knew quite well that she was incapable of preventing him. And again the thought came unwillingly to her mind.

He did not wish her to discuss the matter for certain secret reasons of his own. She was perpetually beating her hands against the barrier of this mystery. Everywhere she found closed doors and guarded gates. Everywhere the "thus far and no farther," confronted her.

She said, with sudden recklessness:

"You make me think of Bluebeard and Fatima!"

Ralph's face looked very strange at that moment.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean there is a mystery." She was astonished at her own temerity.

"A mystery?" he repeated.

She felt that he was making a strong effort to control his anger.

"Yes — here — at Djebl Anaba." She was reckless now of consequence. She had gone too far, and she felt compelled to utter all her fears.

"How dare you say such a thing to me, Pamela?"

"I have been wanting to say it for quite a long time," she answered.

His dark eyes blazed.

"And was this suspicion what you intended to tell Lady Saltmarshe?" he demanded.

"I was not going to say anything disloyal to you," said Pamela. "I was only going to tell her the effect this place had upon me."

His face relaxed a little.

"My dear Pamela — you have a perfectly diseased imagination. I have never known anything quite so morbid or so foolish as your fears. But if it pleases you to imagine that I am hiding anything from you *à la* Bluebeard, pray continue to do so!"

Then suddenly a change came over him, swiftly, and, as it were, in spite of himself. His anger died down; he took her hand.

"Oh, my dear," he said, "don't you see what you are telling me? That you don't love me at all — that you've never loved me. . . . Else how could you allow such horrible imaginings to take root in your mind?"

There was passionate reproach, as well as deep misery, in his eyes that immediately awakened her remorse.

"You know that I loved you," she said, "or I should never have married you. But since we came here. . . ."

"Yes? Since we came here?" he prompted her.

"Something seems to have come between us. Something I don't understand — that I feel I shall never understand. . . ."

Suddenly he took her in his arms, holding her closely. He kissed her with passionate tenderness, holding her as if he would never let her go.

"Nothing has come between us," he said at last. "Nothing can ever come between us — as long as we love each other." He spoke in hurried, detached sentences. "Only don't talk to these people, Pam; I hate to think you should discuss our life here with them."

"Very well, Ralph," she said; "I won't talk about it."

She put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"For I do love you — always remember that," she whispered.

They went into the drawing-room. That night at dinner the Saltmarshes formed the opinion that they were ideally happy, and that Ralph obviously adored his beautiful wife. The marriage, in spite of all prognostications to the contrary, was proving a complete success.

"Though how she can endure it here for months and months at a time passes my comprehension,"

said Lady Saltmarshe to her husband when they were alone.

"I suppose she finds Mellish all-sufficient," said Saltmarshe; "but she is very young — it seems to me a bit risky."

CHAPTER XVIII

"I'VE simply been longing to tell you about the Blairs," said Lady Saltmarshe.

She and Pamela were sitting alone in the big white drawing-room at Djebl Anaba. The sun was shining brilliantly outside, and the air that came in at the open windows was filled with the fragrance of orange-blossom. Purple clusters of bougainvillea decorated the walls and hung graceful garlands in front of the window.

"You haven't heard, perhaps, what East Feddon did for me and Cecil?" continued Lady Saltmarshe.

"For you?" Pamela looked at her in surprise. But the charmingly happy little face reassured her. She showed no sign of being haunted by the terror that stalked even in the noonday.

"We both took an enormous fancy to Father Benedict," she said quietly, "and we asked him to come down and stay with us. We had a particular reason for doing this. Can you guess what it was, Pamela?"

"You mean — that you ——" she hesitated.

"Yes; we placed ourselves under instruction. I wasn't at first quite so keen as Cecil, but he left me quite free to do exactly as I liked. And I thought it would do no harm to learn. People in England seem so ignorant of Catholicism — it is the one subject they never seem to study at its own source; they are content to read about it in the

books of very prejudiced Protestants. But I was educated in a convent, so that very little was new to me. And really, looking back, I think I wanted to become a Catholic as much as Cecil did. We were received just before Christmas."

Her pretty, small-featured flower-face had grown suddenly serious.

"You can't think how wonderful it is, Pamela," she said. "I don't suppose that people brought up in the Faith, and who take it rather for granted, can realize all that it means to a convert who comes into the wealth and splendor of the Kingdom — all at once like that. It is like the inheritance of enormous riches to a man who has been always poor — almost starving. Lots of converts have told me the same thing. . . . And we have been spoilt — Cecil and I — we didn't have to make any sacrifices such as some people do. We weren't even asked to cast aside our nets!"

She laid her hand on Pamela's with a sudden gesture of affection.

"Shall I tell you how it began? We were very dissatisfied when we first went to East Feddon because Cecil had found those old archives at home before the suppression of the monasteries, and read that money had been left for Masses in perpetuity to be said for the repose of the soul of one of his ancestors, who had been a great benefactor. When he asked Mr. Carr, our clergyman, about it, he referred him to the Thirty-nine Articles. But it made Cecil feel uneasy because we, as a nation, had been so horrified at France exiling her Religious Orders; and yet in England nothing had ever been done to restore our own and give them back their property. Cecil said we ought to give back Westminster Abbey to the Benedictines before we said a word against the behavior of the French Government."

"It happened so long ago — I suppose people in England have come to look upon the old churches as State property," said Pamela.

"And then Father Benedict impressed Cecil very much that night at East Feddon, when we were all discussing spiritualism at dinner," said Lady Saltmarshe. "It was his assurance, his certainty, that surprised Cecil. He told me afterward that he felt as if Father Benedict were a prophet delivering a message that was a warning. Mrs. Blair wouldn't listen."

"What has become of Mrs. Blair?" asked Pamela. "Where is she now?"

Her throat was dry; she listened in suspense for Lady Saltmarshe's answer.

"You know that she went away. Father Benedict urged Rupert not to let her remain at East Feddon. She had been carrying on spiritualistic séances there for a long time surreptitiously. I believe she had spent enormous sums of money on the craze. It seems to have unhinged her mind. She has been in an asylum for two months now — and they are afraid she will never be better. She is just like the people you read of in the Bible who were tormented with devils all day long!"

Pamela shuddered.

"I suppose you were not there long enough to hear about it," said Lady Saltmarshe. "I knew nothing myself until long afterward. Then Father Benedict told us a little, and we heard a more detailed account later from Rupert himself. It was a frightful shock for him, poor boy, and he looked years older. He couldn't bear having to do what he did."

"I knew about it at the time," said Pamela. "That last night I was present at a séance. They —they sent for me. Billy didn't want me to come.

It was he who told Rupert afterward. He hadn't any idea until then what was going on — nor why Professor Scudamore was there."

"We saw Professor Scudamore quite recently," said Lady Saltmarshe.

Pamela turned very pale.

"Saw him?" she said.

"In Algiers. We were staying at the same hotel. One day he came up and spoke to us. He told us not to go somewhere or other with a certain guide. He said the man wasn't to be trusted. And then he asked after you and whether ——"

"Whether?"

"Whether you liked being here at Djebl Anaba."

"How did he know I was here?"

"I suppose he saw your marriage in the paper. Very likely, too, Djebl Anaba may have been mentioned at East Feddon. We told him we were coming to stay with you soon."

"And what did he say?"

Pamela felt, with a kind of horror, that the circle was about to become complete, linking East Feddon with Djebl Anaba in a subtle chain of mysterious horror. She gave a little shiver, as if some dark and deep precipice had disclosed itself suddenly at her feet. Or was she not rather looking down with a half-fascinated terror into the deep, ice-black waters of that subterranean lake of measureless depth in the cavern at Aïn-Khramsa? . . .

Not observing the expression upon Mrs. Mellish's face, Lady Saltmarshe continued:

"He said, 'If you have the good fortune to go there you will find many things to interest you and stimulate your curiosity. The history of Djebl Anaba, even in recent years, has been sufficiently remarkable.' Has it got such a wonderful history, Pamela? I thought perhaps he was only talking

for effect, to impress us with a sense of his own extensive knowledge. And yet I don't think I've ever met any one so quiet and humble — outwardly — as the Professor. We almost thought Rupert must have been mistaken, and that the man had never got those immense sums out of Mrs. Blair."

Pamela rose from her seat and moved rather restlessly to the window. She looked out upon the terraced gardens, where already the roses were beginning to tapestry the walls with their gold and crimson blossoms. Rose-pink tulips turned like little flames in the flower-beds. Freesias, with their delicate ivory heads, gave forth a faintly delicious perfume. Far off the mountains were softly blue against a sky of wonderful sapphire.

"Did he say — anything else about Djebl Anaba?" she asked at last.

She had a curious sense of suspense that made her, for the moment, feel sick and cold. She thought that prisoners on their trial for some grave offense involving severe punishment must feel like that while awaiting the jury's verdict. This knowledge that Professor Scudamore was acquainted with Djebl Anaba aroused all her fears, all her terrors. She longed to speak quite openly to Lady Saltmarshe about them, and to ask her advice as she had always intended to do. But she felt now that such a proceeding would have been disloyal to Ralph, even if he had not specially begged her not to do so. He still had the power to command her love, even her obedience. The remembrance of their interview the night before was still fresh in her mind. His kisses seemed to have destroyed all the pain his words had caused. He loved her, and the thought that he was losing her love had tormented him. She had been pitying herself, and he had made her pity him instead. She believed more firmly

than ever before that he was the victim of some obscure and secret suffering.

For the first time she had realized definitely that he was not happy. That some interior torture was at work, giving him ceaseless pain. And it was something that he wished to keep hidden from her. As she realized this, Pamela felt a sense of almost passionate loyalty toward Ralph. She would not be the instrument to inflict more pain upon him. She would practise infinite patience in dealing with him, even with his strange moods, his peremptory requests. She would hide her own nebulous fears from him. It came into her mind with the force of a smiting blow that there was something he dreaded that she should know, because of its power to come between them, because if she learned its nature it was capable of changing her, of diminishing her love for him.

He feared to lose her love. . . .

"No — he said nothing else worth repeating," said Lady Saltmarshe. "But he mentioned some rich Arab who lived in the neighborhood, and who was a friend of his, and whom he said he might possibly visit before he left Algeria. We did not want to talk to the Professor at all after all that had happened at East Feddon, but it was a little difficult to get away from him. We did not see him again, fortunately."

"He must have meant Aziz. He is the only rich Arab living in this neighborhood," said Pamela.

Lady Saltmarshe looked slightly astonished.

"Do you know him?"

"A little. But Ralph knows him quite well — he has always been on friendly terms with him. How strange that he should know Professor Scudamore."

"Very strange. Still, the world is small. These educated Arabs seem to go all over the Continent now — and the Professor is a great traveler. What kind of a man is this Aziz?"

Pamela answered in a light, cold tone:

"I believe I am prejudiced against the natives. But Ralph likes him and considers him an able, cultivated man. He is quite modern and Europeanized in his views."

"Oh, I remember something else the Professor said about him. That he had a younger brother to whom he was greatly attached, and who died under very sad and mysterious circumstances."

"Ralph never told me that. Perhaps he doesn't know about it."

"But if he is such an intimate friend?"

"Arabs are very secretive — they seldom speak of their private domestic affairs — especially of their family affairs."

"Yet I do not see how Mr. Mellish can have avoided knowing what must have been the common talk of the district not a year ago," said Lady Saltmarshe. "That is, if the Professor was speaking the truth."

Pamela turned very white; the room seemed to swim and then turn black before her eyes. The circle was complete. Dark and mysterious, guarding its secret very closely, the links of the chain had joined across this mysterious tragedy of whose details she knew nothing.

Something had happened at Djebl Anaba — not a year ago. Something mysterious and tragic. And it was known to Aziz — to Ralph — to Professor Scudamore.

And Professor Scudamore had perhaps known about it that night at East Feddon, when he had

warned her not to take a contemplated journey across the sea; and when a very violent and obstinate attack had been made in the darkness upon Pamela herself.

As the horror of it seemed to close in around her, Pamela gave two sharp and piercing screams, and to Lady Saltmarshe's extreme alarm she fell heavily upon the floor in a dead faint.

The screams summoned Ralph, who was passing along the passage. He rushed into the room.

"Pamela — my darling! What has happened? What have you been saying to her?" He addressed Lady Saltmarshe with a kind of reproach that was half anger.

"We were only speaking of — of your neighbor Aziz," she said, "of something that Professor Scudamore told us about him in Algiers."

She thought that he could not have heard her answer. His thoughts seemed to be now entirely occupied with Pamela. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her into her own room and laid her upon the divan. He dashed cold water in her face, rubbed her hands, pressing them and slapping them softly with his own. Célestine came in response to his ring, and after a few minutes of anxious watching and hastily applied remedies Pamela opened her eyes.

"Oh, is that you, Ralph?" she said, smiling. "I think I must have fainted. I felt very odd when I was talking to Lady Saltmarshe."

He bent down so that his face was near hers.

"Oh, Pamela — my darling, my darling — how you frightened me!" he said.

Célestine withdrew from the room. This was the second time her young mistress had fainted since she came to Djebl Anaba. Quite clearly this lonely and savage spot did not suit her health, and the

sooner she returned to London the better it would be for every one.

Pamela flung her arms around Ralph's neck.

"Don't go away — don't leave me, Ralph," she said.

It was at that moment that Pamela resolved to join hands with Ralph — to fight the evil thing side by side with him. Did not evil things shrink and shrivel before the appearance of a great and enduring love? Together they would surely be strong enough to conquer it. . . .

"I am not going away," said Ralph tenderly. "Did — did anything frighten you?"

She clung to his hand.

"Don't ask me," she whispered, "don't ask me. . . ."

He raised her hands to his lips and kissed them with an adoring tenderness.

That day marked an epoch in the lives of Ralph and Pamela. It drew them together in a common bond that was tragic rather than happy. It seemed as if they had separated in golden sunshine and had come together again in a mist of cold twilight, only seeking the mutual protection of each other's love against the enemies that, unseen, lurked in ambush about them. Their wounds had healed, but they trod delicately, lest they should reawaken pain from her slumber.

For Pain and Fear were watching them. . . .

Pamela used to pray that Ralph might confide in her. She longed to know the secret that was tormenting him, destroying his peace, making him perpetually apprehensive, suspicious, and on his guard.

She felt in the strength of this new love and sympathy she could have endured any revelations, however terrible; that she could have forgiven almost anything. . . . But he showed no disposition to

confide in her, and she, to quiet his suspicions, hid all her anxiety from him. She hid, too, the fears that assailed her. Both were playing a part.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Saltmarshes remained for some little while at Djebl Anaba, considerably extending the time of their proposed visit. Ralph had, on second thought, taken rather a liking for them both, and it was he who urged them to stay. Pamela was certainly looking better and more cheerful since the advent of Lady Saltmarshe. Every day they went for long rides together through the forest, or for excursions in the motor. The simple, outdoor life did a great deal to restore Pamela's nerves. She enjoyed the change it afforded, and her health benefited in consequence. The wonderful charm of the Algerian spring made its violent appeal to both women, and perhaps it was seen at its best in the beautiful surroundings of Djebl Anaba.

Pamela became close friends with Lady Saltmarshe. They did not again refer to the Professor, and Lady Saltmarshe, being such a new convert, was delighted to descant upon the subject of her religion to a sympathetic listener.

"Aziz has invited us all to dine there," said Ralph one morning. "Should you care to go, Lady Saltmarshe, I can promise you an excellent dinner and a most superb *cous-cous*."

"Oh, I should like it immensely — it will be such a novel experience," she said eagerly. "Have you ever dined there, Pamela?"

"No — I have never even been to his house. He hasn't invited us to dinner before," said Pamela.

She spoke rather reluctantly, for she did not at all wish to go. She felt that Ralph was only desirous of going in order to amuse their guests, for he had never cared for her to meet Aziz.

She knew that she almost hated Aziz, and that she both dreaded and feared him. She did not want to know him or speak to him. . . .

"I will tell him that we shall be delighted to come," said Ralph.

When the evening came, Pamela longed to plead illness, but she felt sure that it would annoy Ralph, and that he would easily see through her innocent subterfuge. Lately his tenderness toward her had been unvarying, and she did not want to disturb the existing harmony. She saw, too, that Lady Saltmarshe was delighted at the novelty of the prospect. They started off in the motor about seven o'clock.

The house at Aïn-Khramsa was an immense building, copied exactly from the model of an old palace at Tunis. Indeed, it was said that Aziz had bought and despoiled more than one house in the old quarter in order to reproduce the design quite faithfully in all its details. The old, striped pillars, the finely proportioned archways of the patio, the delicious fountain that stood in the middle of the courtyard, as well as the splendid, spacious, and luxuriously furnished rooms, made Pamela feel as if she had been suddenly plunged into the midst of the almost insolent wealth of an Arabian Nights' habitation.

And Aziz himself, in his flowing silken gandourah and spotless turban, his flashing diamonds, looked like the hero of one of those fierce, barbaric histories. In his own house he was an Arab of the Arabs.

He was that most subtly dangerous type of Orien-

tal — the one who has acquired a thin veneer of European tastes and customs.

Pamela shrank involuntarily before the gaze with which he greeted her. His eyes seemed to search hers; they had the keenness of a hawk's, bright, clear, unflinching.

And then — she did not know why — the thought came into her head that this man resembled Ralph. Perhaps he had deliberately modeled himself upon this European, with whom he was on such intimate terms, watching him and copying his manners and gestures with the slavish imitation of his kind.

As they sat there in the great salon talking to their host before dinner was announced, a negro servant pulled back the heavy damask hangings, and ushered into the apartment the small, spare, and slightly apologetic figure of Professor Scudamore. Pamela started violently. She heard the Saltmarshes greet him, not cordially, but with a cold politeness that held a faint suggestion of displeasure. She herself bowed stiffly. She looked at Ralph and saw that he bestowed a certain surprised glance upon the quaint little figure, whose bright eyes were watching him from behind the large-rimmed spectacles.

Ralph was the only one present to whom the Professor's name conveyed nothing at all. Indeed, if he had ever heard it in connection with East Feddon he had long ago forgotten it.

"It quite reminds me of East Feddon," remarked the Professor imperturbably, "it is strange that there should be so many of the same party gathered under one roof in the heart of the Algerian forests. I wonder what fate can have brought us all together again in these African fastnesses."

At the mention of East Feddon, Pamela and Ralph glanced involuntarily at each other.

Pamela felt perfectly convinced from the Professor's words that no idle chance had brought him to the Five Fountains. He had come hither for some definite purpose. He had come, perhaps, to take the ends of those broken arcs and make a whole and complete circle.

Her dislike of meeting him again was fully shared by Lady Saltmarshe. She had learned from Father Benedict to have a very definite fear and abhorrence of occult practices. She had hated meeting the Professor again in Algiers; she disliked still more meeting him now. She, too, felt that there was something sinister about his presence there.

Pamela glanced at Ralph, at Aziz, at Professor Scudamore. Each in his way wore a mask-like aspect of resolute reserve. One could read nothing in their faces. They were absolutely and intentionally expressionless. They were like houses with the blinds drawn down, hiding the windows.

The negro servant reappeared, announcing dinner. Aziz gave his arm to Lady Saltmarshe, Lord Saltmarshe took Pamela, Ralph and the Professor — an ill-assorted pair as regards height — brought up the rear. Dinner was served at a rather small round table that stood in the center of a vast apartment. The electric light was screened, so that its lamps were quite invisible, and one could not tell their exact whereabouts, and a pleasant and subdued radiance was thus diffused through the room. Yet these secretive lights gave Pamela an unpleasant suggestion of mystery; they seemed to emphasize a want of frankness, and were symbolic of the character of the man whose hospitality she was accepting so much against her will.

Aziz was a great talker; he spoke both English and French fluently, and he was fond of talking. The Arab is, as a rule, taciturn and reserved.

But Aziz had learned to talk from Europeans. He appeared eager to express his opinions on all kinds of subjects, particularly on that of French politics. As there were no French present, he could do so with some security.

Ralph and Professor Scudamore were both drawn into the discussion of French policy in Morocco. Lord Saltmarshe, with diplomatic reserve, said but little, indeed, he was singularly silent that evening, as if in tacit protest to the presence of Professor Scudamore. Aziz began to speak freely — too freely, perhaps — of the attitude of the French Government to the Catholic Church. This led to a discussion of French missionaries. Ralph spoke eagerly of their enormous work all over the world; of the immense sums still poured out by France for the propagation of the Faith. Despite the spoliation of her own churches, and the poverty into which her priesthood had been plunged, there yet seemed to be no limit to her people's generosity in their desire to send the Message to all nations. Ralph said this with an admiration which astonished Pamela. She had no idea that he had so much sympathy for the Catholic Church. Aziz, taking up the argument, spoke of the immense struggle between the Catholic Church and Islam for spiritual supremacy in Africa. Lord Saltmarshe corrected him on one or two points in connection with the Church.

"We owe that to East Feddon," he said to the Professor; "I daresay you may remember meeting Father Benedict there. He came down to stay with us to exorcise a house that was said to be haunted, and since then he has received both my wife and myself into the Church."

"I remember him quite well," said the Professor; "a very clever, very fanatical man. The kind of Catholic who desires to shape every individual ac-

cording to one rather narrow and conventional pattern. But I have heard that he is exceptionally successful in bringing sheep into his fold. And now he is, so to speak, an autocrat at East Feddon."

"He strongly advised Mr. Blair to assume control of his own property," remarked Lord Saltmarshe icily.

But the Professor showed no discomfiture at this veiled allusion to Mrs. Blair's departure.

"You will forgive my saying so," he said, in his pleasant, non-committal voice, "but Mr. Rupert Blair is quite the most priest-ridden young man I have ever met. It astonished me that one with so much wealth and independence at his command should willingly place himself under such complete direction as that imposed by Father Benedict."

"Oh, well, as the boy has no father, it is just as well that he should have an older man upon whom he can thoroughly rely to advise him," said Ralph.

"And Mr. Mowbray?" continued the Professor blandly, this time addressing Mrs. Mellish in rather a pointed manner; "did he, too, succumb to Father Benedict's influence and become a Catholic?"

Pamela answered coldly:

"I know nothing of Mr. Mowbray's religious views."

Ralph showed an increased interest.

"Really, this Father Benedict seems to have been a very remarkable man," he said; "I should like to meet him."

"He is one of the most powerful men in England to-day," said the Professor.

"And one of the most holy," said Lady Saltmarshe.

Aziz, who had so far taken no part in the dis-

cussion of Father Benedict, now said in a loud voice:

"Why do you let these priests use their power? Especially when England is a Protestant country?"

"We don't let them use it," said Ralph Mellish. "We give no precedence to her prelates, even to the princes of the Church. There are several high official posts from which Catholics are altogether excluded. Their disabilities are still innumerable. And in spite of this, how the Church flourishes upon that sterile soil! I do not belong to any Church myself, but I can't in common justice withhold my admiration when I think of her tenacity, her industry, her persistence."

"How nice of you to say all that, Mr. Mellish!" said Lady Saltmarshe, smiling upon Ralph; "I had no idea you appreciated the Church so much. And one so often hears the other point of view from English people."

"I have seen too much of her missionaries," said Ralph, "not to form an opinion of her work that even a Catholic might regard as exaggerated."

"That is a very curious ring you are wearing tonight, Sidi," said the Professor, breaking a slight pause that ensued when Ralph had finished speaking.

Aziz glanced down at his own hand.

The ring was an old scarab, faintly blue, with a barely legible inscription, set in a modern and very heavy platinum band. It was rather loose for Aziz, whose fingers were long and thin and fleshless.

When he looked up he said slowly:

"If I knew the owner of this ring, I should know all I wish to!"

His eyes flashed and he uttered the words with a kind of violent emphasis. He stared suddenly at Pamela.

"It is not yours, then?" she said politely.

"No — it is not mine. But it was found — on my property. It was found in the cave at the Five Fountains!"

Ralph turned toward Aziz with a slightly contemptuous expression.

"You did not really take adequate steps to trace the owner," he reminded him coolly.

"Once," said Aziz, "I, too, studied your Bible. Next to the Koran I admire it more than any book in the world. But one text especially struck me ——"

"And that was ——?" Ralph's tone was coldly courteous.

"It was: *Vengeance is Mine — I will repay, saith the Lord,*" said Aziz. "I therefore await the fulfilment of the Will of Allah!"

Pamela glanced up quickly. Sensitive and apprehensive, these words seemed to chill the very blood in her veins. What did Aziz mean by these strange words? Under what evil circumstances had he found the scarab ring in the dark, gloomy cave at the Five Fountains? She looked pitifully toward her husband. But his face had assumed that iron hardness, as of a closely fitting mask, which she was beginning to know so well.

She was glad when a move was at length made into the drawing-room, a brightly lit, almost gay apartment, where coffee and liqueurs and cigarettes were served to them. But she felt all the time as if Aziz were watching her.

Once when she glanced nervously in his direction she saw that his insolent gaze was fixed steadily upon her. She disliked him more and she felt more afraid of him than she had ever done before.

Why was Professor Scudamore here? Was he carrying on his sinister occult practices at the Five

Fountains? Was Aziz dabbling also in spiritualism? She had heard that some of the Arabs were advanced in the study of necromancy. Was this meeting merely a fortuitous occurrence of no significance? Or was it closely and profoundly associated with the mystery that had woven so fast a web around Ralph?

"I wish Father Benedict were here," she thought.

She envied the Saltmarshes with their happiness and security. It seemed to her that they both stood outside the zone of danger. They were strengthened by the mighty spiritual support of the Church. As long as they remained her faithful children these nebulous evils were powerless to harm them.

Pamela had never felt any very keen interest in religious questions, but now a vague desire for the consolations of religion was awakened within her. She had a conviction that these would serve to assuage her fears, those blind, unreasoning fits of terror which had been of such frequent occurrence ever since the night of the séance at East Feddon.

She had been sensible, too, during the last few days, of the existence of a strong counter-influence, which she had attributed to the presence of the Saltmarshes, both so full of ardor for their new faith. She felt that as long as they remained at Djebl Anaba they would keep that Something at bay. She began actually to dread their departure — especially now that the Professor had appeared upon the scene.

"I am afraid you did not altogether enjoy Aziz's dinner-party," said Ralph, as they were driving home in the motor that night.

"To be quite frank, we should have enjoyed it much more if Professor Scudamore had not been there," said Lord Saltmarshe. "We did not like

him when we met him at East Feddon, and we liked still less all that we heard of him after we left."

"Aziz does not discriminate," said Ralph, "he is mad about knowing Europeans — he is beginning to despise his fellow-Arabs. It will lead him into all kinds of difficulties and absurdities," he added.

"Professor Scudamore was the cause of all the trouble between Rupert Blair and his mother," said Lord Saltmarshe. "Perhaps you are not aware that he is one of the most famous European spiritualists now living."

Ralph started violently. Long ago he had forgotten the name of the man who had conducted the séance at East Feddon. As he moved, his face was suddenly lit up by the glare of the acetylene lamp; it showed it to be almost livid in its ghastly pallor.

He said in a very careful, measured voice:

"You are quite right — I was not aware of anything of the kind."

"Perhaps you regard spiritualism as a gigantic fraud?" suggested Lord Saltmarshe.

"I have not formed any opinion upon the subject." He spoke as if he wished to close the discussion.

"We learned from Father Benedict the real danger of such practices — of the risk of wilfully entering into communication with evil spirits whose sole object is first to enslave and then destroy the soul."

"I have heard that is the Catholic view," said Ralph. "I am not able to accept it in its entirety."

"Mrs. Blair is unfortunately not the only example of a soul ruined by participation in these forbidden practices," said Lord Saltmarshe. "Father Benedict has done his best. She was actually on the threshold of the Church when she fell into the

hands of Professor Scudamore and his little band."

"And now?" Ralph seemed in the darkness to bend forward a little so as to catch the reply.

Lord Saltmarshe shrugged his shoulders.

"When I speak of her as a ruined soul, I speak advisedly."

Pamela shuddered; she put out her hand almost involuntarily and in the darkness touched Ralph's.

"She was removed to an asylum two months ago and there is practically no hope of her recovery. They called in a very celebrated French specialist. He said it resembled in its symptoms — a case of possession."

Pamela's hand closed upon Ralph's like a steel spring. *Possession?* All the horrors of East Feddon seemed to surround her once more; she could hear herself uttering that terrible cry; she felt again the awful struggle in the darkness from which Billy had released her. . . .

"Please do not speak of these things before my wife; she is very nervous," said Ralph.

The motor stopped before the high iron gates. Two sleepy Kabyles lifted themselves heavily from the ground and stumbled forward to open them. The others were grouped round a camp fire made of brushwood and roots, for the night was cold. They turned faces of languid interest toward the occupants of the motor.

"My Kabyle guards do not look very alert tonight," said Ralph.

They sped up to the house. Pamela descended and walked across the courtyard like one in a dream. Overhead the night sky was of darkest indigo-blue, and the stars shone with the piercing silver-like brilliance of the South. The great black fronds of the palms were lifted in shadowy silhouette. And very far off, stealing across the hills and through the

silent forest-ways, there could be heard the faint, wistful sound of a gezbah; the melody rose and fell with a persistent but not unpleasing monotony.

It seemed to her that Djebl Anaba had never seemed so lonely, so solitary as it did that night. There was something terrifying about its immense and silent solitudes. All around lay the African forests, deep, mysterious, pathless, uninhabited. She thought of the dark cavern, with the black, silent waters of the underground lake whose depth no man had ever measured. She thought of the day when for a little while she had lost her way in the trackless forest. The civilization of Djebl Anaba, its atmosphere of wealth, almost of splendor, seemed such trivial, fragile things beside the great mystery, the savage loneliness, of the forest.

She said good night to her guests and went up to her room. She could not help thinking of Mrs. Blair. She longed to know more details about her. She had fallen, even as Father Benedict had feared that she might fall, into the hands of those evil spirits that had been evoked at East Feddon. They had encompassed her, ruining body and soul and intellect. She was degraded almost beyond help. Almost? . . . Pamela guessed rather than knew that Father Benedict's efforts to save her would be persistent and unceasing.

She herself, an unwilling, ignorant victim, had been for a brief space in actual physical contact with these horrors. . . . How far had they contaminated her? How far had they taken possession of her? She had never felt perfectly normal and serene since that night at East Feddon. It had complicated her life at Djebl Anaba with Ralph; it had often caused her real unhappiness, threatening to estrange her from her husband.

What of Sir James Bett? What of Mrs. Silva?

They seemed, with Mrs. Blair, to form a little forlorn group, eagerly seeking and welcoming those capable of destroying them.

She longed to seek the security of the Church as the Saltmarshes had done, to enroll herself definitely and openly among the soldiers of the opposite camp, to defy the enemy even as the saints of old had defied those denizens of a lower and lost world. . . . And then the helpless loneliness of her position filled her with a sudden sense of despair. Was there no way by which she could free herself? . . .

She desired passionately as never before to leave Djebl Anaba.

CHAPTER XX

"I WISH I were coming with you," said Pamela one day, when Lady Saltmarshe had alluded to her forthcoming departure.

It appeared that her husband had heard he would have to proceed to Rome a little earlier than he had anticipated, and as they had to return to England first they could not well delay their departure much longer.

"I am sure it must often be very lonely for you here," said Lady Saltmarshe. "A woman always wants another woman to talk to sometimes, however happy she is with her husband."

"Yes — I have felt that," said Pamela a little sadly; "but Ralph doesn't seem to understand it."

Remembering Ralph's request, she did not dare mention those old fears which lay at the heart of her desire to leave Djebl Anaba, even if only for a time.

But moved by a sudden impulse, she said:

"I envy you very much. More than I can say, Nina."

"You envy me?" repeated Lady Saltmarshe.

"Because of your religion," said Pamela quickly; "you must feel so secure — so safe — so certain. . . . Not afraid of anything harming you — except for your good."

"I suppose all Catholics feel that kind of security," said Lady Saltmarshe simply; "I didn't know that people outside the Church realized it."

"You've made me realize it," said Pamela; "you and Father Benedict!"

"Oh, did he influence you, too?" asked Lady Saltmarshe. "We hoped very much that he had made an impression upon your cousin, Mr. Mowbray. Rupert has prayed so many years for his friend's conversion. And he told me that he had no hope of it — no hope at all — till after that time when we were all staying at East Feddon last autumn."

"And is Billy likely to become a Catholic?"

"He hasn't said anything definite, but he is at East Feddon a great deal now. And when he is there, he always goes to Mass and Benediction."

"Perhaps, if we ever go back to England, I shall see Father Benedict again," said Pamela.

"Oh, but of course you must. But why do you say if you ever go back? Surely you will come this summer, when the hot weather sets in?"

"Ralph doesn't mind heat — he likes it. He has often been here all through the summer. And so far, he hasn't even mentioned the possibility of going back to England."

"Oh, but shouldn't you hate living here always?"

Lady Saltmarshe looked at her with some dismay in her pretty blue eyes.

"Yes," said Pamela thoughtfully, "I suppose I shall. Of course Ralph told me before we were

married that he intended to make his home here. Perhaps I didn't quite realize what it would be like."

"But you mustn't give in too much to him. It is so bad for a man to have his own way always!"

Pamela was silent.

"You ought to tell him you can't live here all the year round. That you want to go home sometimes and see your mother. What does Mrs. Winton say?"

"She — she was always a little against my marriage," said Pamela.

"You're too young to be buried alive out here. It is a perfectly charming place for the winter and spring. But for always — that does not seem quite fair for any one as young as you!"

Pamela smiled. "I can't change Ralph," she said. "You see, he is so much older than I am. And I am quite happy really. I don't suppose the heat will hurt me, and I daresay I shall get used to the loneliness as time goes on. I was thinking really of other things — of how I should like to learn — as you have done — to be a Catholic!"

She said this almost timidly.

"It must be such a tremendous help — when one is in any difficulty or — or danger. . . ."

Lady Saltmarshe looked slightly astonished.

"Are you in earnest, Pamela?" she asked.

"Yes; I'm quite in earnest. It must make one feel so safe — so secure," said Pamela.

"Yes — but in what way? Do you mean safe from doing and saying wrong things?"

"Yes; but not only that. I mean safe from — evil influences."

"Evil influences?" She was frankly puzzled now and showed it.

"From evil things that can harm and hurt you — and possess you. . . ."

"Possess you?"

"As Mrs. Blair is possessed," said Pamela reluctantly.

She turned very white as she spoke; there was terror in her large gray eyes.

"I'm almost afraid to speak of it, Nina; I'm afraid of their hearing. I don't want them to hear."

"Them?"

"Yes. Aren't they surrounding us continually? Aren't they waiting for us — even now — even here? Waiting, as it were, at the gate?"

"My dear Pamela, you mustn't be morbid about Mrs. Blair. She had, you see, wilfully rejected the grace offered to her — she was in a very dangerous state. And she persisted in these spiritistic practices until her whole moral nature was ruined. Her mind gave way only at the end. Before then she had taken the money that should have been spent on East Feddon and given it to Professor Scudamore. Then she took drugs. No one knew about that. She made everything easy — it was her own doing from first to last. There are souls that seem to be bent on their own destruction, just as there are souls that have never, never fallen from grace."

Pamela still looked unconvinced.

"I do not think I shall ever feel safe until I am a Catholic," she said at last. "You believe, don't you, that you are in a state of grace when you have been to confession and received absolution? That is what I want to feel — it must give one such a sense of peace — of security. It is a sacrament, isn't it?"

"Yes — the sacrament of Penance. It is a means of obtaining grace. People outside the Church don't seem to realize that side of it."

"It must be a lovely feeling," said Pamela simply.

"I will lend you some books," said Lady Saltmarshe, "and surely you could find a French priest here who would instruct you? You need not wait till you return to England. It is always a pity to wait, Pamela. You might not have the grace or the opportunity again."

"Yes; there is a priest at the Five Fountains. I think Ralph knows him. I will ask him. It is quite a small mission — there are a great many scattered all over North Africa."

"You don't think your husband would object?"

"I don't think so. I shall ask him."

"Surely if they were to tell him it is necessary for your happiness?"

"Not for my happiness — for my safety," said Pamela. "Did they ever tell you what happened that night at East Feddon?"

"Yes; Rupert told us. Billy Mowbray gave him a detailed account."

Pamela shivered; she seemed to tremble suddenly from head to foot.

"Ever since then," she said slowly, "I have felt as if I were haunted. . . ."

"Even out here?"

"More than ever out here. But you mustn't ask me. I can't tell you. I mustn't speak of it."

"My dear Pamela, the sooner you go home and have a thorough change the better. This solitary life isn't good for a girl of your age!"

"I am quite sure Ralph wouldn't let me go home."

"Let me speak to him," said Lady Saltmarshe.

"Oh, no — you mustn't do that on any account. It would make him very angry," said Pamela, with a frightened look. "He mustn't know I've talked to you like this. He has forbidden me to speak of these things, and he would be angry if he knew I had told you as much as I have!"

"Then he knows? You have told him?"

"Only a very little. The subject distresses and irritates him. I'm not allowed to speak of it."

Her eyes, wide and tragic, gazed helplessly at Lady Saltmarshe.

"But can't you tell him that you are ill — that you really want a change?"

"He knows I am not ill," said Pamela.

"But you can't be at all strong. Look how you fainted the other day. I had never seen any one faint before. It alarmed me. I think your heart must be weak. You ought to see a specialist. If I had fainted like that, Cecil would have taken me to half the specialists in London. Mr. Mellish didn't even call in a doctor."

"Oh, he is used to it," said Pamela, trying to speak lightly.

"Used to it? You don't often faint, do you?"

"I did once before. The day we arrived here. I think the journey had tired me."

"And didn't you see a doctor then?"

"There wasn't any necessity. It — it doesn't last long," said Pamela. "I wish," she went on, "that you were not going away so soon. I wish you could have stayed. I am afraid."

The curtains swung back and Ralph stepped briskly into the room.

"Afraid, Pamela?" he said, with a curious, bright smile.

Pamela looked flushed and rather guilty. Lady Saltmarshe said quickly:

"Pamela was telling me that you mean to spend the whole summer at Djebl Anaba. Don't you think it will be a little hot for her? It won't do to risk her health, will it?"

Ralph said in his cold, soft voice:

"Djebl Anaba is charming in the summer. The forest is always cool and shady, and at night there is a sea-breeze. I don't think you need have any fears for Pamela's health, Lady Saltmarshe." The slight emphasis he laid on the word *you* conveyed to her the impression that he considered her a little interfering.

"It must be much hotter than Rome, and Cecil said he would never let me stay there all through the summer."

"Rome is a city," said Ralph, "that makes all the difference."

He wondered a little at her persistence.

"I hope Pamela doesn't think the prospect so dreadful?" he said, sitting down near his wife and regarding her with a very strange and rather anxious expression.

"Oh, no, Ralph — you know I don't. I suppose all women get homesick at times."

"And you confess to feeling homesick?"

"A little."

She did not wish him to question her too closely in front of Lady Saltmarshe.

"Pamela, like all modern women, is restless and nervous. She craves for excitement and change," he said, in a light, ironic tone.

Lady Saltmarshe began to feel that she had done more harm than good by interfering in the matter.

She only said:

"Very few women can stand much solitude. Perhaps, indeed, only those who have some definite work — writers and artists, for instance."

" I shouldn't like my wife to lead that idle, shopping, gossiping life of most of the society women in London," he said, with an air of finality. " I want her to like quiet things — beautiful things."

He rose and walked across to the window. Across the terrace, bright with tulips and freesias and early roses, beyond the white wall, garlanded with frail mauve mists of wistaria, he could see the forest, freshly green, spreading out to the horizon, where its soft gray tones melted into the ardent blue of the April sky. Some fruit-trees showed their splendid masses of pink and white blossom. The air was soft, and fragrant with orange-blossom.

" Don't you think, Lady Saltmarshe, that a woman could learn to be happy, even very happy, here? " he said. " To prefer it, perhaps, in the end to any other kind of life? "

" I daresay some women might," said Lady Saltmarshe. " It is certainly very beautiful, and you have made a lovely home here."

She rose and went slowly out of the room.

Ralph turned and came back to where his wife was sitting.

" Pamela," he said, " you haven't been complaining, have you, of the dulness here? "

He looked at her wistfully.

" No — I never complained of the dulness."

" She seemed to think that you wanted to go home. That you disliked the prospect of staying here all through the summer."

" It is true I did say that I should like to go home in the summer."

" You mustn't," he assured her, smiling, " represent me as too much of an ogre! "

" You know I never do that, Ralph."

She spoke with a kind of gentle patience.

"I do so want you to like Djebl Anaba," he said, "you haven't given it a fair trial yet."

"But I do like it, Ralph. You have made a lovely home here — as Nina said just now."

"And yet you crave to go back to those silly London friends of yours!"

She was silent.

"You really prefer that old life? You would go back to it?"

"For a time — just for a little," she said. "Perhaps it would help me to settle down here when I came back again."

"You mean you are so capricious that you think you might learn there to be homesick for Djebl Anaba?" he suggested.

"I don't know. I can't say," she said.

She felt in her heart that if ever she set foot in England again nothing would induce her to return to Djebl Anaba — to a house that seemed to her haunted by malignant presences.

"But you might let me make the experiment, Ralph!" she said almost gaily.

Ralph looked at her in silence. He felt that he would have been perfectly happy with her had they inhabited the most forlorn and desolate oasis of the Sahara. And he wished to be all-sufficient for Pamela. It hurt his vanity that she should seek any change, or grow weary of his society.

"No," he said, after a pause; "the experiment might prove too costly."

He wanted to keep her at Djebl Anaba, hidden apart. He was jealous of her old ties, her old friendships. Far back, unacknowledged even to himself, there smoldered in his heart the flame of that ancient jealousy of Billy Mowbray — the man who had wished to marry her.

"Your mother allowed you to have very unde-

sirable friends," he said; "Mrs. Blair, for instance."

He waited a few moments, then he added coldly:

"I shouldn't care for you to go back to the kind of thing you found at East Feddon."

It was as if he had struck her a sudden blow. She rallied her courage, and said:

"It was my first visit there. We were never very intimate with Mrs. Blair. We liked Rupert, because he was Billy's friend." She changed the subject abruptly by saying:

"Do you know if Professor Scudamore is still staying at the Five Fountains?"

"I don't know — I suppose he is," said Ralph. "Aziz must be only too delighted to get a European to stay with him."

"Do you think Aziz is a spiritualist, too?" she asked.

"Very likely. Many of the Arabs are. But he is too modern and enlightened to be led away by it. He is an avowed free-thinker."

"Don't you think you ought to warn him about Professor Scudamore and tell him how he got those immense sums of money out of Mrs. Blair? I think he ought to know what a bad — what an unscrupulous — man the Professor is."

"My dear Pamela — how can I interfere in people's private affairs? It is really no concern of mine."

"I wonder if it ever occurred to you," continued Pamela, "that there was any particular reason for the Professor to go there just now?"

It was his turn to look astonished.

"Why should there be?" he asked.

In his slow, indolent voice there sounded now a note of alarm.

"Because it struck me there was!" said Pamela.

Ralph made no answer. His face wore a slightly more austere look than usual.

Desperation gave Pamela courage, and she said:

"Do you know if anything mysterious and tragic has happened lately at Djebl Anaba, or . . . or . . . at the Five Fountains?"

His dark eyes looked straight into hers.

"I do not know of anything," he said.

"Nothing which the Professor could help him to explain?" she pursued, a little mercilessly.

"What do you mean, Pamela? What on earth should there be? I hope the servants have not been retailing bazaar gossip to you? It is not always very edifying."

"I have not been listening to bazaar gossip," said Pamela proudly.

"If anything mysterious or tragic had happened here — or at the Five Fountains — I should have been certain to hear of it," he said.

"And there has been nothing?"

"I think," he said, "you are letting yourself become the prey of those foolish, nervous fancies again. I hoped that Lady Saltmarshe's company would have helped you to overcome them. It was partly for that reason I urged them both to stay. I thought she would help you to chase away these bodies!" He spoke almost contemptuously. Then, as if suddenly relenting, he took her hand:

"Pamela, dear — you must accustom yourself to the Arab atmosphere. It is always full of intrigue and mystery. Orientals are very secretive, often about quite trivial, harmless things. They adore mysteries, and they seldom act in a really frank and straightforward manner, as Europeans do. I think our dining at the Five Fountains was a mistake. I thought it would be a novel experience for the Saltmarshes and amuse them, but it didn't seem a

success. I am sure they disliked meeting Scudamore even more than they said. We won't go there again. If I go it will be alone."

He bent down and kissed her.

"I hope you will ask the Saltmarshes to stay on as long as they can, if it gives you any pleasure."

"I am afraid they will have to go. He has to be in Rome sooner than he thought. And they must return to England first."

"And she wanted you to go with her?" he asked.

"Yes — she wished I could go, too. I should have liked it — just for a few weeks."

He held her hands.

"Pamela, dearest — you mustn't ask to go away from me so soon. I want you, beloved." He kissed her, drawing her to him. "I can't let you go," he said.

Again it came into Pamela's mind that he had some reason — some hidden, secret reason — for wishing to silence her fears. The sense that this mystery involved him also had never been so passionately persistent in her mind. And she was beating her hands against a barrier that would not give way.

It was Ralph who barred the way — who would not let her know the nature of this subtle, sinister thing that divided them.

She made one more effort:

"When Professor Scudamore met the Saltmarshes in Algiers he told them that the history of Djebl Anaba, even in recent times, was a remarkable one," she said. "Do you know anything of its history, Ralph?"

"I didn't even know it possessed anything so respectable as a legend," he answered, "but many of these old Arab houses have histories of a kind."

It was her last attempt, and it had proved as

futile to win the truth from him as all the others. Ralph either would not or could not speak.

"I will ask him about it, if you like, when I see him again," he said.

She felt perfectly convinced that Ralph would take good care not to meet the Professor again while he remained at the Five Fountains.

CHAPTER XXI

LADY SALTMARSHE had been deeply impressed by her conversation with Pamela. She had for some time past thought her looking ill; had noticed the strained and rather drawn expression of her face, and although outwardly she and Ralph appeared quite happy together, Nina had nevertheless divined that, for some reason or other, Pamela was very far from happy at Djebl Anaba.

Their conversation had not thrown a great amount of light upon the matter, but that what there was was a very disagreeable light Lady Saltmarshe was unable to deny.

She had hoped that the untoward happenings at East Feddon had not permanently affected Pamela, although at the time Rupert's account of them had filled her with a certain misgiving. Now she could not but believe that Mrs. Mellish was in a sense haunted by those malignant presences with which she had so unwittingly been brought into contact.

Pamela was undoubtedly making a valiant effort to free herself. The web had entangled her, not, perhaps, to any great extent but still in such a manner as to affect her peace of mind. And it was evident that on this point Ralph Mellish not only gave her no sympathy, but positively discouraged all reference to it.

Yet Pamela was brooding over it secretly, until it had begun to affect her health.

The fate of Mrs. Blair had deeply impressed Lady Saltmarshe, and the events which had led up to it had assumed a profound significance in her mind.

Mrs. Blair, it was known, had never been the same after that final séance at East Feddon. Her downfall had ensued most rapidly. Whether it was due in part to the fact of her detection, and to the finality with which sentence was passed upon her by Rupert and Father Benedict, it was impossible to say. But she became imbued with a reckless carelessness, as if there were now no further need for common caution. She had long taken small doses of morphia in secret, at the suggestion of one of the "controls," but now she took it openly and boasted of the quantity she daily injected. Her rapid *dégringolade* ended a few weeks later in a maniacal outburst, when she had been removed to an asylum, helplessly insane.

She was an exaggerated case, but to students of the effects of spiritualism she was by no means an isolated one.

"I wish we had not to go quite so soon, Cecil," said Lady Saltmarshe to her husband that same day. "I don't like leaving Pamela. I've tried to persuade her to come with us, but she doesn't think Mr. Mellish would let her."

"But why should she want to go?" asked Cecil.

"She isn't well — this place gets on her nerves. And, then, she wants to see Father Benedict!"

"Father Benedict?" echoed Lord Saltmarshe; "do you mean she wants to become a Catholic? But surely there are lots of priests in Algeria who could instruct her?"

"It isn't only instruction that she needs. It is the help of a clever and wise priest. Some one who understands as Father Benedict understands. Some one who could quiet her fears. She hasn't told me much, and she says Mr. Mellish doesn't like her to speak of it. Perhaps he doesn't quite realize. Cecil . . ."

"Yes — what is it, darling?"

"Why do you think Professor Scudamore is staying at the Five Fountains? What had that affair at East Feddon to do with this place? It was an Arab control that night — speaking only Arabic and insisting upon Pamela's presence — so Rupert said. Do you think it had anything to do with Pamela or her husband or with Djebl Anaba?"

Lord Saltmarshe looked attentively at his wife. Was she growing morbid and nervous also? "My dear — what on earth could it have to do with them?"

"Oh, I don't know, Cecil," she said, "but I feel that there must be some dreadful connection between the two! And there is something terrible about this house — I've felt it almost ever since we came here. Something unnatural and — and malignant. I am sure Pamela feels it, too. It is affecting her health — look how frightfully thin she is. And, then, remember how she fainted that day when I first mentioned Professor Scudamore."

"I think perhaps Mellish is right in not letting her talk about it," he said; "but if you are going to let it get on your nerves, too, Nina, we had better leave at once!"

He looked at his wife with affectionate anxiety.

"Pamela has begun to think that only by becoming a Catholic can she free herself entirely from the influence of those powers that attacked her at East

Feddon. She wants to be in a state of grace — to receive sacramental absolution."

"Would Mellish mind? He seems to be a very peculiar man in many ways."

"Pamela doesn't think he would mind."

"Well, perhaps he will let her come home for a few weeks with us, and then she could be instructed and received."

"Yes; I shouldn't like to go away and leave her here. I don't feel as if it were quite safe for her to be here alone."

"But she isn't alone," he objected; "she has got her husband."

"He doesn't like her to speak of these things. And you can see it is wearing her to a shadow."

"I have to be in Rome in three weeks' time," said Lord Saltmarshe, "so we must positively leave the day after to-morrow. We shall have quite a rush to get ready as it is. And I couldn't think of leaving you here . . . if there is any real cause for fear, which I hope there isn't."

"I think I had better write to Father Benedict and ask his advice," she said. "How black the sky is, Cecil. I do believe we are going to have a storm."

She bent her head out of the window. A great drop of rain splashed in her face. Far in the distance there sounded a faint rumbling of thunder, and a swift streak of yellow lightning darted like a forked tongue across the blackness of the clouds.

"How delicious it smells," she said as the fragrance of the wet earth reached her.

"Had you not better come in? You will be drenched," he said.

Presently the storm broke with sudden violence. Loud claps of thunder echoed savagely across the

mountains; the lightning cleft the skies like vivid serpents of fire. Rain and hail began to fall, clattering heavily upon the roof. It was like a tropical storm, with the rain falling as if it had been poured out of gigantic buckets.

Lady Saltmarshe shivered. Her husband closed the green persiennes and then shut the windows. Presently through the silence of the house they heard a sudden, rather prolonged cry. This human sound, so frail and piteous in comparison with the tremendous noise of nature's armaments that dominated the scene without, startled them both. What did it mean? They looked at each other in silence. Lady Saltmarshe crept a little closer to her husband and held his arm tightly. She was not, as a rule, afraid of thunder, but there was something fierce, something almost terrible about this violent and savage storm, that seemed to be attacking house and forest as if it only desired their complete destruction.

Outside it was growing dusk. Black clouds still stained the west, where generally, at this hour, the sky was painted with crimson and amber. They swept remorselessly over the mountains, whose outlines had been so sharp and clear such a short time ago. The noise of the storm, succeeding that strange silence which seemed to reign almost permanently at Djebl Anaba, unnerved Lady Saltmarshe. It intensified for her the desolation of the place.

"I feel as if evil things had happened here," she whispered.

Ralph Mellish was in the library when the storm broke; he was doing accounts. He was an extremely methodical man, and liked to keep his affairs in perfect order. Something made him look

up from his books with a sudden start. He opened the window and stepped out on to the little balcony. In the obscurity caused by the storm the figure of a man was dimly visible upon the terrace below.

"Is that you, Aziz?" he said.

"Yes," said the Arab, looking up; "may I come in? I was walking in this direction and thought you would kindly permit me to take refuge here."

"Ring the bell, please, and they will let you in," said Ralph. He re-entered the room and began to put his papers tidy. Then he struck a match and lit the fire. In a few minutes Aziz appeared.

His teeth chattered; he was livid with cold. His garments were soaking. His face wore the curious, inscrutable, secretive look of the Oriental.

"Just now, as I was coming upstairs," he said, "I think I must have startled Mrs. Mellish. I heard her scream."

"Oh, the storm must have made her nervous," said Ralph uneasily. "Where did you see her?"

"She was standing in the corridor as I came upstairs," said Aziz.

"Will you sit near the fire and dry yourself? I think I had better go and see her."

Ralph left the room abruptly and hurried to his wife's apartments. He found her lying on the divan, her head buried in the cushions. As he drew near he could hear her sobbing.

"Pamela, dearest, what is the matter?"

"I want Lady Saltmarshe — please ask her to come!"

She did not move as she uttered these words; her face was still hidden. Outside a clap of thunder seemed to rend the very firmament.

"But, Pamela — I'm here. Why do you want Lady Saltmarshe?"

She lifted a tear-stained and disfigured face to his.

"She understands," she said; "I can tell her. I'm frightened, Ralph. The storm frightened me, and then . . . Aziz . . ."

"Yes, Aziz heard you scream. He told me that he thought he had startled you. That was why I came."

He spoke gently, but there was a note of remonstrance in his voice.

"Don't let Aziz come here," she said, "he terrifies me more than ever. Why did he come like that in the middle of the storm? What does he want?"

"He got caught in the storm. He is perfectly drenched. Pamela, I couldn't have refused a dog shelter!"

"But . . . Aziz . . ."

"He is my friend, Pamela," said Ralph patiently.

"But why do you have him for a friend?" she said. "It is very unusual, surely, for a European to make a friend — an intimate friend — of an Arab — a Mohammedan . . ."

"I was here for so many years quite alone. He was my only near neighbor. He was useful to me."

"And now that Professor Scudamore is staying with him . . ."

"That is unfortunate, I admit. Still, we can not very well advise him not to have him there."

"There is no way out," said Pamela, speaking in a rapid, almost incoherent way, "no way out as far as I can see, except . . ."

She stopped and loked at Ralph.

"Except?" he said.

"By going away ourselves. By leaving Djebl Anaba — and finding another home."

"You know that is impossible, Pamela."

She seemed to him now to be making a strong, almost pitiful effort to control herself.

"Perhaps you want to go back to him now, Ralph?" she said presently. "I think the storm is nearly over. He will wonder at your leaving him so long." She rose and went toward her bedroom.

"I will come back as soon as he has gone," said Ralph.

He returned to the library.

CHAPTER XXII

As Ralph entered the room Aziz looked up with somber, melancholy eyes.

"Your wife isn't happy at Djebl Anaba?" he said.

Against his will Ralph answered:

"No, she isn't. I can't make out why."

"Does she know what happened here a year ago?"

"No. I purposely didn't tell her. I was afraid it might make her nervous. She is inclined to be nervous as it is."

"Perhaps she has heard something about it. Servants gossip, you know."

"I don't see how she could have heard anything."

Ralph had a curious dislike to discussing his wife in this way with Aziz. He disliked, too, the easy way in which the Arab mentioned her. Although he was in so many ways Europeanized, Aziz would still have resented any breach on Ralph's part of that etiquette which makes it a solecism to inquire after the women of an Arab's household.

"She may have heard a garbled account," he continued.

"I think it extremely improbable," said Ralph.

Indeed, Pamela's fears had always seemed to him formless, reasonless, rather morbid.

"I believe it is the loneliness, the solitude of Djebl Anaba that affect her," he added.

"Perhaps she wishes to return to England," said Aziz; "in that case it might be as well to let her go."

The speech struck Ralph as both impertinent and interfering. He was astonished as well as annoyed by it. Nor did he like the tone in which it was uttered. There had been a hint of malice, of venom.

"It is not unusual for Europeans to send their wives to a cooler climate during the summer," continued Aziz, imperturbably; "with us, of course, it would be impossible."

"I have no intention of letting my wife go home," said Ralph haughtily.

He wished heartily that Pamela had endeavored to conceal her dislike of Aziz from that individual himself; he had evidently perceived it and had been annoyed by it.

"But if Djebl Anaba does not suit her health?" persisted Aziz.

"Her health has not suffered in any way that I am aware of."

"Still — it might be wiser," said Aziz softly.

He gave Ralph a long look of close scrutiny.

"Better for you . . . better for her . . ."

He fingered idly a large pink coral charm which he wore suspended round his neck by a fine gold chain.

It was such a charm as the more superstitious among the Arabs wear to avert the evil eye.

Ralph had never known Aziz to wear such a thing before. He wondered a little that he should do so, and then dismissed the matter as trivial and unimportant.

"I must tell you that Professor Scudamore wishes to conduct an experiment here," said Aziz. "But he does not desire to do it while your wife is in the house. He thinks her too susceptible — too much of a medium. You are doubtless aware that there was an unpleasant episode in connection with a séance at which she was present in England last autumn.

"But why here?" said Ralph, disregarding the question.

Aziz shrugged his shoulders.

"I ought to have explained to you," he said, "that I sent for the Professor to come and try to elucidate the affair of Mahmoud."

The two men looked squarely into each other's eyes. Both faces might have been cast in iron, so immovable were they.

Aziz looked like an eagle of the desert with his bright, unflinching, steady eyes, his long, slightly hooked nose. There was something of defiance in Ralph's look as he returned his gaze. Not a muscle of his tense face moved or flinched.

"We have been making some experiments at the Five Fountains," said Aziz, "and they have been quite fruitless. The Professor thinks we might get better results here. More satisfactory and more definite results."

Ralph was a shade paler.

"I may as well tell you at once, Aziz, that I shall not permit anything of the kind. I forbid you to bring Professor Scudamore to my house. He is well known as a most unscrupulous man. Both my wife and I have a very strong objection to

spiritualism. We object to it on different grounds, it is true. I, because I believe in it too little, and she, because she believes in it too much."

"Do you mean to say that you refuse your assistance?" said Aziz. "You, who told me once you would not leave a stone unturned to track this betrayer of our honor?"

"I would not refuse my assistance in any legitimate effort. I consider the means employed by this man Scudamore extremely illegitimate!"

"He wishes to make tests here," said Aziz obstinately.

"What tests?"

"Chiefly, I believe, photographic."

"I shall not permit anything of the kind. I forbid you to bring the man here!"

There was an iron hardness in his tone.

"Very well. I will inform him of your decision."

Aziz came across the room.

"The storm is over," he said. "I must be going home. I forgot to tell you that I have not had the cave closed up yet. The Professor wishes to take some photographs there."

He withdrew almost silently. Ralph felt a deep sense of relief when the man had gone.

What had he meant by his strange words? Through all the smooth suavity of his speech Ralph had detected a hint of menace. It was as if he had almost commanded Ralph to send his wife home, and thus clear the way for the Professor to make his desired experiments at Djebl Anaba. An eerie feeling of almost superstitious fear came over Ralph. He remembered Pamela's suggestion that the episode at East Feddon had been in some way connected with the place. She, too, had believed that Professor Scudamore had come to the Five

Fountains with a specific object in view. How far she was right in both these conjectures he hardly yet knew. She was unstrung, a little hysterical, but her terror was not quite without foundation. . . . Little beads of perspiration stood upon Ralph's brow. What sinister and malign influence had crept into the atmosphere of the place? Why did his wife shriek and faint at the approach of Aziz?

A few minutes later he went back to his wife's room. Pamela was reading a book; it was a relief to see her sitting there so calm and composed, as if nothing had happened.

"Pamela," he said, "I have been thinking it over, and if you really wish to go home for a few weeks with Lady Saltmarshe you can make arrangements to do so."

Pamela jumped up from her seat and ran eagerly toward him.

"Oh, Ralph — how perfectly sweet of you! May I really?"

Her eyes shone; she looked younger, happier than she had done since their departure from England. He noticed then how thin she was. Yes, she was changed. Those few months in Africa had produced a very marked change in her. He drew her to him and kissed her.

"You really wish to go so much?" he said wistfully.

"Yes. But couldn't you come, too? I shan't like leaving you, Ralph," she added, with sudden compunction.

"No — I can't leave Djebl Anaba. I was away twice, you see, last year."

"I would rather you came. I want you to come," she whispered. She felt that she could not possibly leave him here alone, with that formless terror haunting the place.

"No. If you go, you must go without me."

"I must go," she said, after a pause. "I must go, just for a little."

He had, of his own accord, offered her escape. He was giving her a precious gift, and the bestowal of it hurt him. She could read pain in his eyes. Her heart softened to him.

"It is very good of you, Ralph. I ought to refuse. But I can't." She thought of Father Benedict and all that England might now hold for her of peace and security; spiritual gifts she dared not yet estimate . . . "I must go . . ." she said.

She drew his face down to hers and kissed him.

"Thank you, dear Ralph," she said again. There were tears in her eyes.

The expression in his face, so sternly controlled, was a little ambiguous; it puzzled her. There was relief in it, despite the odd look of wistful pain.

"Why do you let me go?" she said.

"Isn't it reason enough that I wish you to do as you like? If you're not happy here — if you don't feel well and the place makes you nervous — you had better have a change. I don't want you to stay here against your will. I've been forgetting," and now he smiled a little bitterly, "that you're more than twenty years younger than I am. That you're still almost a child. Very much a child in some ways, Pamela!"

"I don't feel like a child, Ralph. I feel very old. And I shall want you."

"You can't have it both ways," he said. "I must stay here. You can go or stay, just as you like. I want you to feel perfectly free. I can't keep you in a cage. Well, it is time to dress for dinner."

He rose and went away rather quickly, as if it

were a relief to him to have settled the knotty point. Pamela's eyes filled with tears. She believed that the scene of the afternoon had exasperated him into letting her go away. He was getting sick of her and her nerves and her unreasonable fear of Aziz. He wanted his old solitude and peace again. She was not making him happy. Her discontent annoyed him.

She wished she could understand him. He was never frank and open with her. She had always the impression that he was hiding something — something of vital importance — from her.

Was it fair to take advantage of this permission he had given her and leave him? She only knew that now it had come to the point, nothing else seemed to matter; her whole will was set upon leaving Djebl Anaba. She might tread on her own heart as well as upon Ralph's by so doing, but the desire to go triumphed over all else.

At dinner that night she said to Lady Saltmarshe:

"If you will let me I want to go home with you when you leave here."

Both her guests looked astonished. What had made Mr. Mellish change his mind so suddenly?

"Oh, we shall be delighted," said Lady Saltmarshe, "but can you be ready in two days? We shall have to start then, and even now we shall have barely a fortnight in England."

"Why, of course she can be ready," said Ralph; "it doesn't take Célestine long to pack a couple of trunks."

What had come to Ralph? He was evidently determined to put no obstacles in the way of her departure. His change of front was now so complete that, against her own will, it aroused Pamela's suspicions.

"You must come and stay with us, and meet Father Benedict," said Lady Saltmarshe.

"I should love it," said Pamela eagerly.

She was so happy at the prospect that she had quite lost her rather strained expression. To-night she looked indeed radiantly beautiful.

"I want to see Father Benedict," she added.

Then another thought occurred to her. She would have to tell Ralph that if she saw the priest again, it would be with the avowed purpose of becoming a Catholic. She wondered what he would say — whether he would object.

After dinner they strolled out into the garden. There was a superb moon, and the April night was very warm and windless. In the orange grove the nightingales were singing, as if serenading the stars. Beyond lay the forest, dark, silent, and mysterious.

Pamela found herself alone with her husband. She slipped her hand into his. He looked down into her face, that was a little white and wistful in the moonlight.

"Ralph I'm beginning to think you want to get rid of me," she said, half laughing.

"My dear Pamela — what strange things you say! Why should I want to get rid of you?"

"I don't know. But I felt to-night as if you were beginning to want me to go. I know I have been horrid."

"You haven't been horrid," he said, with a smile. "You've been all that's beautiful and loving. . . . It is I who have been too selfish in wanting to keep you here in a cage. . . . I've been like the silly idiot in the poem who said:

"'How could it grieve when its feet were tied
With a silken thread of my own hands' weaving?'"

"You haven't," she said; "but I think I have

worried you to death with all my fears — and nerves."

"Leave your fears behind you in England, Pamela. That's what I want you to do — to have a change and get rid of them."

"Ralph, I am going to get rid of them. Shall I tell you how? I'm going to ask Father Benedict to help me."

"What do you mean?" he asked quickly.

"I mean I want to be a Catholic, like Nina ——"

"Has she started proselytizing already?" he asked, with a smile.

"No — I spoke to her first. Ralph, should you mind?"

"I shouldn't mind at all. I have no prejudices, Pamela. You can do as you please. But don't be too impulsive — reflect well before you take the step. It is a very serious one — it entails heavy obligations. If my wife is a Catholic, I'd like her to be a good one."

"I have thought about it a great deal," said Pamela simply; "it is the one thing that makes me very anxious to go back to England. I want to consult Father Benedict. Perhaps he will not make me wait very long, because I shall be wanting to come back to you. When I have been received —" She paused.

"Yes?" he said.

"I shall come straight back to Djebl Anaba."

"Why, what difference will it make? You hate the place."

"Perhaps I shan't hate it so much then. Perhaps I shall want to come back."

"*Speriamo!*" he said half gaily, half wistfully.

She still held his hand — Ralph's long, nervous right hand. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, she lifted it to her lips.

"I — I shall miss you," she said shyly.

"And I shall not like your going. . . . Still, I was a brute to try to keep you prisoner. I'd made a pretty cage, and I wanted you to stay in it and sing to me. Now the door is open. Fly away, Pamela!" He made a gesture toward the wide, dark stretch of forest, lying silent under that sky filled from end to end with the splendid African stars.

"I shall come back, like a carrier pigeon," she said, entering into his mood.

CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. WINTON received her daughter on her return from Algeria without any undue manifestation of curiosity. If the marriage had proved a failure — and she herself had never contemplated that it could ever be in any way a success — she hoped that Pamela would come back and live with her again. She had missed her very much, and the house had been lonely without her.

Mrs. Winton, more or less unfortunate in her own experience, was not a great believer in happy marriages. And Pamela in marrying had flown in the face of all advice. She knew very little of Ralph; he had immediately taken her completely away from all her old friends and placed her among surroundings that were remote and unaccustomed. No doubt when the novelty had begun to pall Pamela had awakened to the fact that it was unendurable.

Else why should she return home thus abruptly after less than six months of her new life? She gave no reason for doing so; her telegram had been

brief, only announcing the mere fact. Mrs. Winton had spent those few days between the arrival of the telegram and the appearance of Pamela in a state of curiosity and misgiving that entirely interfered with all her enjoyment.

She was prepared to find Pamela changed. Who, indeed, would not be changed after an experience so unparalleled? But when she came face to face with her daughter she saw that the change was more than a mere physical one. It is true that she was thinner and paler than she used to be; she looked older, too, was even more grave and composed. Mrs. Winton had never before found Pamela's extreme reserve quite so irritating a thing. She longed to hear her whole history since the day she left England with Ralph. But something in Pamela's face assured her that it was a thing which neither she nor perhaps any one else would ever know.

One could not say definitely that Pamela looked either happy or unhappy. It was something more than that, something more vital. She bore the aspect of one who had passed through some severe crisis. She had weathered the storm, but she had not emerged unscathed. In time Mrs. Winton hoped that Pamela might give her at least some clue as to its exact nature.

"It will be delightful having you with me all the summer," said Mrs. Winton, looking up from her writing-table on the morning following Pamela's arrival. "I have any number of invitations — all the old places, both in England and Scotland. I am sure they will all be charmed to hear that you will accompany me!"

Pamela looked up from an absent-minded perusal of the *Times*.

"Oh, but I am only to be in England for a few

weeks," she said, rather hastily. "I must be back by the end of June at the latest."

"Oh, you can not possibly go back there in the summer like that — it would be madness!" said Mrs. Winton. "I am sure Ralph will not expect you to do that."

Pamela's face wore a rather obstinate expression.

"I could not possibly leave Ralph all the summer," she said; "and he says he can not get away."

"But he did not object to your coming now?"

"Oh, no. You see, it was such a good opportunity for me to travel with Lady Saltmarshe."

Pamela looked vaguely at her mother. If it had been difficult to talk to her in the old days, when there had been nothing at all to hide, it was a thousand times more difficult now that she had a secret which she could not possibly confide to her. a secret, too, which seemed to weave a web around her whole life at Djebl Anaba, to color everything with its dye, to strike at the very roots of her happiness.

"I hope you left Ralph quite well?" said Mrs. Winton.

"Yes, thank you. He seemed quite well. He told me to say that if you cared to visit us next winter, your room is always ready for you."

"I might fit it in," said Mrs. Winton, screwing up her face as if in vain endeavor to recall the precise plans she had made for that remote epoch. "I shall be going to Nice as usual. Yes — I might come on from there very easily. I want to see your home, Pamela. I suppose it is very beautiful?"

"Yes — I think it is very beautiful," said Pacela, without enthusiasm. "Of course, it is lonely. You might find it a little dull — after Nice."

"Oh, I never mind a dull place for three weeks,

as long as there is plenty of sunshine. One can do a mild rest cure, and that is very good for the nerves. But I do not think a solitary place is good for any one's nerves after three weeks or so!" concluded Mrs. Winton.

She glanced at her daughter, who made no reply.

"Don't you find it trying yourself?" pursued Mrs. Winton.

"I am growing accustomed to it," said Pamela calmly; "and then, you see, we had the Saltmarshes there for nearly a month. You must ask them about it. I am sure they will tell you that Djebl Anaba is a charming place!"

"But not in the summer — you will be roasted alive!" said Mrs. Winton; "it is quite criminal of Ralph to allow you to go back then. He ought to exert his authority and forbid it. July and August — yes, even September — must be quite unbearable. You will lose your looks and your complexion, Pamela, and unnecessarily, too, which makes it all the worse. If you had married a man whose profession obliged him to live in India I should have said nothing. But Ralph can hardly expect you to share his ardor for the desert!"

"I have no looks to lose now," said Pamela, with a faint smile. "I am a perfect scarecrow."

"Yes — you are very thin," said Mrs. Winton; "you must have a great deal of milk and cream while you are at home. And I think I shall ask Dr. Lenton to come in and have a look at you. He might advise the seaside, and I am sure he would be very much opposed to your returning, at any rate before September."

"I cannot leave Ralph for all those months," said Pamela, "it would not be right. And as for the seaside, I hardly think I could manage that. Nina Saltmarshe and I are both going down to East

Feddon next week. We shall be there quite a week — that already eats up a great deal of my time."

"To East Feddon!" echoed Mrs. Winton, in a tone of great surprise; "I did not even know that there was any one living there. Poor Mrs. Blair is in an asylum, as no doubt you have heard. I have often wondered what Rupert had done with the place. He ought to let it."

"He has retired and lives there himself — with Father Benedict," said Pamela, glancing rather nervously at her mother. "It is to see Father Benedict that I am going to East Feddon," she added a little reluctantly.

"Father Benedict? The famous preacher? I have been several times to hear him! I did not know that you knew him, Pamela."

"I met him at East Feddon last autumn," said Pamela; "he is Rupert's guardian."

"I cannot imagine why you should want to go down there and see him again. You might at least spend these few weeks with me!"

Mrs. Winton both felt and looked disappointed. She had counted upon Pamela's remaining with her all the time of her sojourn in England.

"I am afraid it is necessary for me to go down there," said Pamela. "Father Benedict has been ill, and he is to stay there until he is fit for work again. He asked Rupert to invite myself and Nina. You see, I am going to become a Catholic. That is partly the reason why I have come home."

"Oh, won't you find that a great bore? Catholics are so restricted. There are so many things they mayn't do."

"I don't think I shall mind that," said Pamela, with a faint smile. She had not her mother's dread of anything like discipline. "Anyhow, I am quite convinced, and Father Benedict is going to instruct

me. Nina has been one for some time, and so has her husband."

"And what does Ralph say?" inquired her mother.

"Ralph doesn't mind," said Pamela; "it would have made it very hard for me if he had objected. Fortunately, he didn't. He only expressed the hope that if I did become a Catholic I should be a good one."

"What an extraordinary view to take!" said Mrs. Winton, feeling that her son-in-law was more than ever an enigma to her. "But what put the idea into your head, Pamela?"

"Oh, several things. Nina for one. She told me how happy it had made her. She lent me books. I shouldn't have left Ralph for any other reason."

"Well, I only hope you will not find it very different from what you expect," said Mrs. Winton. "I don't myself advise you to take the step, Pamela. You won't be nearly so free. You'll find yourself dreadfully hampered."

"I'm not afraid of that," said Pamela.

"The Lavingtons will be delighted," said Mrs. Winton, turning, as was her wont, to the brighter side of the picture; "you know how exclusive they are. They seldom entertain any one but their fellow Catholics. I think it absurd myself, but, still, their house is a most agreeable one."

"I would rather you did not mention it to Lady Lavington just yet," said Pamela; "not till after I have been received. I don't want to talk about it. You see — it is so private a thing — so sacred a thing. It is a very serious step — even Ralph sees how serious it is."

"I never thought you were very religious, Pamela. Not like the Scriven girls, for instance, who are always spending their time in the slums and

attending early services. Their mother can hardly get them to go to a dance, and they are so tiresome when she insists upon it. Luckily the youngest one, who is just out, is quite different, and I hear she is already engaged. I wonder what you will do if you ever have any children? Shall you bring them up as Catholics, too?"

"Of course I shall. I am sure Ralph will not try to prevent me, supposing I ever have any."

She put down the paper and rose from her seat.

"Are you going out this morning, mother? If so, we might go together — I want to get one or two things."

"Yes, I have ordered the car at half-past eleven. Oh, and Billy is coming to lunch. He wants to see you again."

"I shall be very glad to see him," said Pamela. "I think I shall tell Billy. It will interest him."

She added, after a brief pause:

"You see, he has known Father Benedict for a long time."

She went out of the room, thankful that her mother had made so little remonstrance, and had even found comfort in the soothing conviction of Lady Lavington's approval. It had been easy, too, not to reveal that long sequence of events, beginning at East Feddon last autumn, which had led up to her decision to become a Catholic.

Now that she had left Djebl Anaba, things had begun to assume their normal proportions. The events there had become, as it were, less terrifying in retrospect, and there was a new longing in her heart to go back to Ralph, not to leave him too long alone. She had been able to reassure her mother as to her immediate reason for leaving him, even for a short time. She knew that Mrs. Winton had been only too ready to assume that they were not

and had never been happy together. And though Pamela realized by this time that she had been unhappy, even very unhappy, at Djebl Anaba, it had not really been the fault of her husband. He had been considerate and kind, but he had lived too long alone himself to realize how trying such solitude might prove to his young wife. Of his love for her she had no doubt, but she felt that the overwrought state of her own nerves had worried and irritated him. Now she knew that she would be able to return to him with a new strength and she was assured that they would be much happier in the future than they had ever been. People were not always happy until they had become thoroughly accustomed to each other's ways — she had often heard it said that the first year of married life was the most difficult of all. And hers had been, perhaps, exceptionally difficult, owing to the strange and new surroundings in which she found herself. It was a life which had absolutely no connection with the one she had left; it was an abrupt breaking of old ties coupled with the arbitrary enforcement of an entirely new régime. Also, she had found herself less free as a married woman than she had been as a girl. Mrs. Winton had always given her a singular amount of liberty, and had allowed her in reason to do as she liked, as far as the conventions of society permitted. Pamela missed that freedom very much. Ralph was a man who naturally ruled and controlled every one about him. He made the mistake of treating her almost as if she had been a child. And although Pamela had never actively rebelled, she had from time to time resented this attitude very much. If she wanted anything, she had to ask for it, and perhaps even plead for it, as she had done when it was a question of inviting the Saltmarshes to stay with them. In her mother's

house she had always invited her friends whenever she wished; it had only been necessary to say that she had done so, and Mrs. Winton had never once objected or demurred. But all this would not have mattered greatly to Pamela if her half-superstitious fear of the place had not made her really unhappy and morbid at Djebl Anaba. If Ralph had only yielded to her entreaties not to invite Aziz to the house, she felt that everything would have been much easier. But he had not acquiesced; indeed, he had shown her plainly that he intended Aziz to come, and he had not been deterred even when he saw that it made her timid and apprehensive and even ill. He put it all down to her nerves and imagination, and though he had been alarmed when she fainted, it had made no lasting impression upon him. The Arab still came and went pretty much as he chose. Apart from the fact that she considered such an intimacy in a sense lowering to her husband, she disliked the personality of Aziz. She did not trust him, and she could not help associating him in her mind with the mysterious veridical apparition she had seen at East Feddon. Whether the two had any real connection she could not yet say, but she felt convinced in her heart that they had.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Mrs. Winton and Pamela returned from their shopping expedition, they found Billy already awaiting them in the drawing-room.

Pamela wondered if Rupert had informed Billy of her intention to become a Catholic. But even if he had done so, there were still many things she wished to discuss with her cousin. And she was glad to think he no longer endeavored to avoid her.

Perhaps his coming to-day meant that he was growing reconciled to her marriage.

"I knew we should be late," she said, smiling, as she greeted him. "We have been out shopping, and I have hardly seen a shop since I went to Africa. There is hardly a place you could dignify by such a name at the Five Fountains. I am afraid I must look dreadfully dowdy!"

Billy reassured her. "You look perfectly charming," he said, "only you are disgracefully thin. But if there are no shops, I do not see how you can buy any food. Does Ralph go out every morning and slay your dinner, and do you dress and cook it?"

"No, of course it isn't as bad as that," said Pamela, laughing; "we have every kind of luxury, and the cook is marvelous. I am not starved at Djebl Anaba. Mother is even brave enough to say she will come and do a rest-cure there next winter!"

"I hope you will do one too, then," said Billy; "you look as if you required it. By the way, is it really true that you are going down to East Feddon next week?"

"Yes — it is quite true. Didn't Rupert tell you?"

"Yes; he said he expected you."

His face expressed wonder, but he said nothing then. Only after luncheon, when Mrs. Winton left the cousins alone together in the smoking-room, he lit a cigarette and said thoughtfully:

"I didn't think you would ever set foot in East Feddon again as long as you lived."

"It will be quite different now," she said; "I'm not at all afraid of going back there."

"Djebl Anaba has done one thing for you if it has helped you to forget that night," he said.

Pamela's face was very white.

"Oh, Billy — that's what it has never been able to do!" She spoke almost against her will. But the longing to confide in him was very great and triumphed over all other considerations.

He looked at her anxiously.

"Won't you tell me about it, Pam?" he said.

In the old days Pamela had never shown the very reserved side of her character to Billy. He had always been able to extract the truth from her. And she had often told him things, just as a sister might have confided in a very sympathetic brother. The old habit had never quite deserted her.

"I hardly know how to tell you, Billy," she said.

For a moment he was silent. Then he said doggedly: "I felt as if I must see you. I knew you would never speak openly to Mrs. Winton. I wanted to see you and ascertain for myself if ——" He paused.

"Yes," she said, "what did you want to ascertain?"

"If you were really and truly happy, Pam," he said, flushing.

"Yes . . . I am quite happy," she said; "you needn't be afraid about that. Mother wondered, too, why I had come home — whether there was any reason."

"You don't look very happy," he said, watching her closely.

"Because I think there has always been something to prevent my being very happy."

"Things such as ——?"

"Oh, Billy, do you really want to know?"

"I feel — I must know. Your happiness matters to me more than anything in the world."

"Don't make a mistake," she said quickly, "it has nothing to do with Ralph — with our love for

each other. That remains . . . as it always was. . . . But I have been haunted — haunted ever since that night at East Feddon last November."

"Even at Djebl Anaba?"

"More than ever at Djebl Anaba," she said, and a look of terror came into her dark eyes. "There is something about the place that seems ——"

"Yes . . . that seems?" he gently prompted her.

"That seems, as it were — accursed!" She lowered her voice. "Do you remember when the medium spoke that night she spoke Arabic?"

"Yes," said Billy.

"Well, I have often wondered if it had anything to do with Ralph. Anything to do with Djebl Anaba."

It was Billy's turn to look pale; his face was grimly set. Had not this hypothesis occurred both to him and to Professor Scudamore? Why had Pamela come independently to the same conclusion?

"What made you think of that?" he said abruptly.

"I have felt that something must have happened at Djebl Anaba — some mystery which Ralph never speaks of. I have sometimes thought that he knows; only he will not tell me. He does not wish me to know."

"But what could there be, Pam? What could there be?"

"Oh, Billy, I can't tell you how often I have asked myself that question! I can find out absolutely nothing. On every side I come to a blind alley — I can get no further. But the place has always seemed to me haunted and accursed, as if evil things had happened there."

"You mustn't go back!" he said with energy;

"You must tell Mellish so. Have you ever told him frankly what you feel about it?"

"I told him a little at first. But the subject irritated him and he thought me nervous and morbid. Afterward I tried to keep my fears from him, as I saw they displeased him, but I'm afraid I wasn't very successful. Billy — did it ever occur to *you* that the affair at East Feddon concerned him?"

"Since you ask me, Pam, it did. I thought so when it happened."

"Why didn't you say so at the time? Why didn't you tell me?"

"It wouldn't have been of any use," he flashed out.

"Of any use?" She looked at him, puzzled.

"It wouldn't have stopped your marrying him. . . . And, in any case, I was hardly the person to interfere!"

Yes; he, too, unwillingly, had been dragged into that conspiracy of silence which had so far hidden the truth effectually from her. Some delicate instinct had prevented him from suggesting the thought which had occurred to him as well as to Professor Scudamore.

"No," she said quietly, "you are right. It wouldn't have prevented my marrying Ralph."

"But it can prevent you from returning to Djebl Anaba. Why don't you tell him frankly that you can't go back — urge him to give up the place?"

"I can't do that, Billy. It is his home, and I don't believe he would ever settle anywhere else. He likes the freedom and the sunshine. He hates the life of cities. . . . And I must live where he chooses. Wives have to do that, you know, Billy."

"What sort of life can it be for you there, if you feel like this about the place? . . ."

"Oh, Billy — it is no use discussing that. It is my home and I must go back. As it is, I don't like to think of leaving Ralph so many weeks alone. Especially ——"

"Especially?"

"Professor Scudamore is out there — staying with Aziz, an Arab whom Ralph knows very well — at a place called the Five Fountains. . . ."

"*Professor Scudamore!*" exclaimed Billy. "Do you mean he is there now? That you have seen him again?"

"Yes," she said, "while the Saltmarshes were with us Aziz invited us over to dine with him, and we were all rather horrified to find the Professor there. All, that is to say, except Ralph, who, if he had ever heard his name, must have forgotten it."

"What sort of a man is this Aziz?"

"I don't like him, Billy," she said.

"Does Mellish know him well?"

"Yes. He always comes to consult Ralph about things. He had been a lot in Europe. But I think I am prejudiced. You see ——" She stopped. It seemed absurd, but she scarcely dared utter her thoughts aloud. She felt as if countless evil things were listening to her.

"Tell me, Pam," he said, almost with a note of entreaty in his voice.

"He always reminded me of — of the control — the one that materialized — and attacked me."

"Do you mean that he resembles him?" said Billy.

"Yes. So much that when I first saw Aziz I thought it was the — the spirit we saw. And I fainted — quite dead away. Ralph was frightened. Oh, Billy, what is the matter? Why do you look like that?"

His pallor was almost livid, his tense, set expression alarmed her.

"But you say he is a friend of Ralph's?" he said at last.

"Yes — outwardly he is his friend. But sometimes I have thought that he is false — that secretly he is Ralph's enemy. I know I should not have thought of this if it had not been for East Feddon. That put me on my guard. I have sometimes wondered if Ralph guesses too that secretly Aziz hates him."

Billy's throat was so dry he could scarcely speak.

"You haven't told me yet why you came home, Pamela," he said presently.

"Because," she answered, "I'm going to become a Catholic, Billy. I want to be on the side of the Church. I think it will help me to be brave and strong. Do you remember how Father Benedict spoke that night? Now I look back upon it, he seemed to be an angel of light, just as the Professor was an angel of darkness. I felt that they were fighting under two different standards. I'm going to fight under the same standard as Father Benedict. When I go to East Feddon next week, he will instruct me; and I hope he won't make me wait very long, because I know I ought to go back to Ralph."

"And what does Ralph say?"

"He didn't mind at all. Oh, Billy, I think he was glad; but he didn't say so."

"Why should he be glad?"

"Because he thinks perhaps it may help to cure the nervous fears that were making me almost ill. You see, I couldn't bear Djebl Anaba, and that was a great disappointment to him. He had so set his heart upon my liking it. When I go back I shall try and like it for his sake. I shall try and settle

down there. I do want to make him happy."

"And isn't he happy?" said Billy.

"He was distressed about me. I think that made him unhappy."

"But he must see that you are looking ill — that it isn't all imagination and homesickness!"

"I feel as if my becoming a Catholic would put everything right. And even if things go wrong, I shall have support and — and consolation. The Church always gives that, doesn't she, Billy?"

"I suppose so. I've seen a lot of Father Benedict from time to time. I often go down to East Feddon for a few days now. I think he could very easily persuade any one who thought about the matter at all to be a Catholic," said Billy gravely. "He struck me as being a very holy man with a very strong personal influence over other people's souls — a man trained and accustomed to the guiding of souls. Doesn't he seem like that to you, Pam?"

"Yes," she said, "that is why I came back. I didn't want any one else to instruct me and receive me. You see, he has known everything from the beginning, and I think he will be able to advise me."

"Oh, yes — he'll be able to do that," said Billy confidently.

"And I shall be fighting not only for myself, but for Ralph," she said. "I have sometimes felt very strongly that Ralph wants my help."

"You told him what happened at East Feddon?"

"Yes," she answered.

"I suppose he scoffed at it?"

"Not at all. He said a very curious thing — about you, Billy. . . ."

"About me?" echoed Billy in astonishment.

"Yes," she answered, "he said that you had gone into the burning house to save me."

"The burning house?" repeated Billy.

"Yes. That was how it seemed to him. He thought you had been very brave."

"The burning house," said Billy again.

Evidently the expression had struck him as at least unusual.

"I wonder what made him call it that?" he said musingly.

So Ralph had realized the danger, obscure, occult yet perfectly objective, which had threatened Pamela. And in the face of this he dared defy fate and keep her at Djebl Anaba — a place which she had admitted she believed to be both haunted and accursed.

CHAPTER XXV

IT was at the close of a warm and beautiful June evening that Lady Saltmarshe and Pamela drove up to East Feddon Hall. In the scented summer dusk the old house stood up rosy and peaceful against a background of beech trees. Beyond, to the west, the sky was amber-colored. East Feddon Broad lay tranquil and calm as a mirror, with the trees and banks faithfully reflected in its still waters; there was scarcely a ripple on its smooth and flat surface. The wide fields to the east were touched with gold and pink. Clumps of hawthorn trees were massed with snowy blossoms.

Across the placid surface of the lake a wherry was passing very slowly, with its heavy brown sail unfurled. From the garden the scent of roses and stocks and syringa filled the air with delicate perfume.

The very sight of the place, in its calmness and exquisite serenity, compelled Pamela to think of

Mrs. Blair with compassion and pity. She thought of her as a soul in bondage, chained and bound by those forces she had summoned so heedlessly. And she had loved East Feddon. The garden had been her pride. If she were capable of remembering anything she must think of the place with a passion of regret, an unappeasable nostalgia.

"How beautiful and peaceful it looks," said Pamela softly; "it is almost impossible to believe that anything dreadful ever happened here."

From a window at the end of the east wing a red light burned steadily.

"The sanctuary lamp," said Lady Saltmarshe.

She had deferred her departure for Rome on purpose to act as her friend's godmother.

As they approached the house, they saw that Rupert was standing on the steps to greet them.

"How nice of you to come," he said boyishly.

"But it's so nice of you to have us, Rupert," said Lady Saltmarshe, "and how lovely the place is looking."

"Yes — the garden will be at its best these next few weeks," he said. He led the way into the hall. A figure in a black soutane rose and came forward to greet them.

"I think you both know Father Benedict," said Rupert; "he is my patient now. He has been ill and I am going to insist upon his staying here till he is better."

"I must get better in time for the Mission on the twentieth," said the priest.

He was thin almost to emaciation, but his blue eyes were still keen and penetrating.

"I am very glad to see you both again," he said. "So you have brought me a catechumen, Lady Saltmarshe?" He smiled kindly upon Pamela.

Over and over again he had, as a priest, witnessed

that soul-drama which, by innumerable ways and for innumerable different reasons, brings the convert to the door of Mother Church. Yet never had it seemed to him other than a miracle of divine grace, a clear insistent call to the individual soul. How many times, too, he had seen that call obeyed with blind, unthinking submission, oblivious to worldly prudence, heedless of the entreaty of earthly love, as if the soul, overwhelmed by the majesty of the summons, had become deaf and blind to all other pleading. A chance word spoken—a chance action witnessed—a trivial question asked—perhaps on things slight as these the first ray of illumination would depend, yet no less surely would they serve as instruments than those graver, deeper reasons which sometimes bring wise and learned men as humbly as little children to seek admission at those closed gates.

Sometimes even from the ranks of her bitterest enemies there would be called into the Church one who suddenly realized, as St. Paul had done, Whom he was persecuting.

But in the case of the little group of people who had assembled at East Feddon last autumn, there had been an immediate response to the appeal that had made itself heard in so unlikely an atmosphere. Lord and Lady Saltmarshe, already dissatisfied with their own church since the episode of the discovery of the ancient bequest for Masses, had not delayed in taking the step which seemed to them so clearly indicated. Mrs. Mellish, for very different reasons, was now eager to be received. And Father Benedict hoped that at no very distant date Mr. Mowbray might follow the example of the three others.

As they went up to dress for dinner, Pamela whispered:

"Please take me to the chapel, Nina."

Lady Saltmarshe led the way. Within the chapel it was almost dark, except for the red lamp burning before the tabernacle. There was a faint perfume of spent incense. Tall white lilies stood upon the altar and before a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes.

In the dusk Pamela knelt down and hid her face in her hands. Lady Saltmarshe knelt by her side for a few minutes and then went softly away, leaving her there praying.

A deep silence reigned there. No stir from the house could be heard. She remembered the old pious belief that when only one worshiper watches before the Blessed Sacrament, angels are present close to the tabernacle.

First Pamela prayed for her husband. He was always in her thoughts, more than ever now that he was alone at Djebl Anaba. And in the fortnight that had already passed since she left, she had learned more than ever how much she loved him. She felt nearer to him now than she had often done when he was with her. She saw things more clearly. She saw the tragedy of this soul, tormented, as it seemed to her, with a secret she might not know nor share. She had beaten her hands in vain against that barrier of his making. The knowledge of its existence had made her impatient and apprehensive. She had felt that it had embittered their love for each other. In his love there had been always something wanting. Strange and reserved and enigmatic, he had never admitted her into that dark and secret chamber. At the last there had even been an eagerness on his part to send her away. This knowledge had been the most sharply painful of all. He had actually wanted her to go.

Yes, she had often failed him. She had been

disappointed because her life with him had not proved smooth and easy. Now she hoped all that would be changed. With faith and love, could not one go forth doubly armed to conquer all difficulties?

She felt that Ralph had urgent need of her prayers. He seemed to her surrounded by those haunting and evil presences. She prayed passionately for him.

As she knelt there, the door opened very softly and she saw the black figure of Father Benedict enter the chapel. He went right up to the altar-rail, and after genuflecting he knelt down and bowed his head. He was very still — so still that she was almost afraid to move for fear of disturbing him.

It was getting late. Pamela rose from her knees and crept out of the chapel, leaving the priest there alone. At dinner he did not appear, for he preferred to have his meals alone and to retire early. Lady Saltmarshe and Pamela were the only guests, as Rupert had rightly believed under the circumstances that they would prefer to be alone.

Now the time had come, Pamela began to feel something of that strange eagerness which characterizes almost every convert to cross the boundary and receive the freedom of the Church, to acquire that splendid inheritance, with all its gifts of grace, and faith, and boundless love.

Nothing in all her life, not excepting her marriage, had ever seemed to possess the immense importance of the step she had resolved to take. No difficulties had been placed in her way, a fact for which she was profoundly grateful. It would have been hard to go against Ralph's wishes, to set them aside. But he had raised no objections; he had almost seemed pleased at her decision. Her path had been made perfectly smooth. Even her

mother's objections had been trivial and futile and simply worldly.

"I was afraid this place might reawaken all her old fears," Lady Saltmarshe told Father Benedict on the following morning.

They were sitting in the library beside the open window and could see Pamela strolling on the terrace with Rupert Blair, a tall, slim, white-clad figure.

"You see, it was here," she said hesitatingly, and then paused.

"Exactly, it was here," said Father Benedict.

"It seemed so strange," continued Lady Saltmarshe, "that Professor Scudamore should have reappeared at the Five Fountains."

"Yes, I was astonished when she told me that just now. What object could he have in going there?"

"I think he had some reason that was connected with Mr. Mellish. Perhaps, indeed, he had some special object in seeking them out."

"The whole story is inexplicable to me," said Father Benedict, "if there is a clue to the mystery we have not found it. I am convinced that there is something behind it all — something we can not explain."

"Professor Scudamore spoke of a tragedy that had recently occurred at Djebl Anaba. But Pamela said that her husband had denied any knowledge of it."

"I wish I could meet Mr. Mellish," said the priest. "One can only think that some determined assault is being made upon him. The Professor is, of course, capable of blackmail. He certainly blackmailed Mrs. Blair, and thus extracted immense sums of money from her."

"Do you mean an assault such as menaced Mrs. Mellish that night?" asked Lady Saltmarshe.

"That is only a hypothesis, of course," said the priest. "Mr. Mellish seems to be in an unusual position. He has made an intimate friend of this Arab. We find now that Aziz is also an intimate friend of Professor Scudamore. If we link up all these connections, we still have no solution."

"I sometimes wish," said Lady Saltmarshe, "that she were not going back."

"We can not keep her here against her will. Her duty lies with her husband. And she seems eager, even anxious to return to him as soon as she has been received."

"And that will be soon?" inquired Lady Saltmarshe.

"Under the circumstances, it must be soon. But as far as I can tell, she is perfectly ready. She has the faith. She is not acting, as I feared she might be, from any strong superstitious motive. She is convinced — that is half the battle. We must pray that she may win this grace for her husband, too."

"I can't help feeling that all this mystery is connected with Mr. Mellish. I believe that there has been some incident — perhaps some tragedy in his life — which lies at the root of it all. Something which is known also to Aziz and Professor Scudamore."

"I have thought of that also."

"If one could only find out what it has all got to do with that séance here last November!" she exclaimed suddenly.

"It may have nothing at all to do with it. That the figure of an Arab was objectively perceptible to at least four persons present we are all aware," said the priest. "But remember that the Catholic

Church has never made any pronouncement concerning the objective reality of these so-called spiritualistic phenomena; she has merely forbidden her children to approach such practices. But where there can be little doubt as to their objective reality, she accounts for them by the theory of evil spirits, and in support of this points out the inevitable moral and physicial deterioration of those who practise spiritualism. The suggestion that the spirits thus materialized are the spirits of departed persons wishing to communicate with those they loved on earth is wholly incompatible with the Church's teaching concerning the life of the world to come. But it is hardly to be doubted that on certain occasions evil discarnate spirits of great physical force have been thus summoned, and that symptoms very closely resembling possession have subsequently manifested themselves among the victims who were present. That such practices should be wholly condemned and forbidden by the Church is, in itself, sufficient proof that she considers them extremely dangerous, and persons exposing themselves to those dangers run a grave risk of losing their faith, their morals, and their physical health. Poor Mrs. Blair is an extreme case, but she is an example of the ill effects of spiritualism upon a woman of naturally weak character."

"I suppose there is no change? I did not like to ask Rupert."

"The doctors are afraid there will never be any change. The impulse toward self-destruction appears in her case to be chronic; she requires the most vigilant watching. I have noticed over and over again that the deaths of leading spiritualists have been mysterious, occurring under circumstances that suggested suicide or — or violence."

"It seems very hard upon Mrs. Mellish that the

first months of her marriage should have been made so unnecessarily unhappy," said Lady Saltmarshe.

"Yet she seems devoted to her husband," said the priest.

"Oh, yes — I think she is fond of him. But she never seemed to us really happy. She knew so very little about him, and he is a curious, strange man — not like other men."

At that moment Pamela approached the window.

"Aren't you coming out, Nina? It is such a delicious morning. Rupert thinks we might go for a sail."

CHAPTER XXVI

A FEW days later, when Pamela had just returned to the house from a long motor drive, she saw a letter for her lying on the hall-table. It bore a French stamp and the envelope was of the thin gray paper that Ralph always used. It had gone first to London and was re-directed in her mother's handwriting. But she guessed even before she examined it that it was from Ralph. He had only written once or twice since she left, for he was not at all a good correspondent.

Pamela went up to her own room before she opened the letter. She had a curious but strong instinct that it contained unwelcome or at least unpleasant news.

The writing was very shaky, even more so inside the letter than upon the envelope. The first page contained only a few remarks about Djebl Anaba and the weather, which, since her departure, had become very hot. It looked, Ralph said, as if there might be a prolonged drought. But as she turned the page, she read these words:

"Pamela, do not think me hard-hearted if I tell you quite plainly that I would rather you did not return to Djebl Anaba. You have never liked the place, and I don't think it suits you, and I have seen from the first that you were not happy here. Perhaps I was wrong to try to impose such a life upon you. You are very young, and you are not accustomed to so deep a solitude as Djebl Anaba offers and wherein lies, to me, its principal charm. I thought, indeed, that your love for me would help you to settle down, but I could not help perceiving, to my sorrow, that your love was diminishing every day. You were a prey, too, to fears and suspicions — suspicions, I must add, that were not always kindly toward myself. It is too soon, perhaps, for us to call our marriage a failure, but I believe that it will be better for us both if you remain in England all through the summer. In the autumn I might perhaps get away for a little, and then we could meet and come to some agreement as to the future. It is not easy for me to write in this way to you. But I can not help seeing that it is necessary, and I hope you will also be able to recognize this necessity. At present, it will be better for you to tell your mother and your friends that you wish to avoid the heat of the summer here, and therefore you will remain in England. I can see no other way out of the *impasse*."

The letter dropped from Pamela's hand. She felt as if she had received a blow upon the heart, and her strength seemed all at once to fail her. At first she did not cry; she was numbed and paralyzed with pain. It was impossible that Ralph had deliberately written this cold and brutal letter. It meant that his love for her was dead; that he did not wish her to return to him, and had taken the

first opportunity of telling her so. It was easy to see that he had come to regard their marriage as a failure. All her pride rose in revolt against the situation he had created. He was weary of her. He had ceased to love her. She was to be set aside. Because she had entreated him to let her go away from a house that had always appeared to her to be haunted, he had now forbidden her to return.

And she had meant to go back armed with a new strength, filled with a new purpose of remolding their life, of making it happy and secure.

Ralph had abruptly frustrated these plans. His letter was perfectly plain. It admitted of no misconception.

"I shall go back," she said aloud. The hot tears burnt and scalded her eyes. "I shall go back! Even if he turns me from the door when I get there!"

She read the letter again. There was a firmness in his decision which showed that he had thought the matter well over and meant every word he had written. What kind of a reception would she have if she defied him and went back to Djebl Anaba? Would he forbid her to enter that house from which she had longed so passionately to escape? Perhaps the Kabyle guards would have orders not to open the heavy iron gates to admit her. Perhaps she would be shamed thus even before the natives. . . . She pictured herself standing there alone and friendless, with the long, white road dipping in front of her, and beyond the grove of palms and ilex-trees that surrounded the house, and beyond again the dim, mysterious line of those endless, silent forests. . . . She saw herself repudiated by the man who had once loved her.

No, she could not believe it. Some influence had been at work supplanting hers. Some influence that

was urging Ralph not to permit her to return. Whatever it was, she was determined to fight it. She felt sure of her own strength. She would combat this power that was seeking to separate her from Ralph, and that was inducing him to shut his very doors against her. Yes; she had been discontented, dissatisfied, and nervous, but she had done nothing to deserve this harsh and pitiless punishment. And she could not believe that she had forfeited her husband's love. She remembered his passionate kiss of farewell; it could not be the last that her lips would ever know.

Her first instinct was to ignore the letter wholly, and to make plans for returning to Djebl Anaba as soon as possible. She might even pretend to Ralph that she had never received it. But she dismissed this thought immediately from her mind, almost as soon as it presented itself. She was not going to stoop to any petty deceits in her endeavor to win back her husband. Only one thing was plain to her — she could not possibly accept this letter of his as an ultimate and irrevocable decision. She must make at least one effort to retain what was so dear to her. She could not let him go without a word. Love was stronger than pride. She was prepared to sacrifice her pride. And in her heart she still felt convinced of his love. He was not a man to care easily or lightly for any woman. And, having once given his love, she did not think that he would easily or lightly take it away again. His love had meant a great deal to her; she could not live without it. She saw now that she had made no effort to guard her treasure. She had been careless; she had been always too sure of it. She would go back to him; on her knees she would perhaps implore him to forgive that carelessness, that apparent indifference.

Pamela did not quite know how soon the strong suspicion that Aziz was influencing Ralph first came into her mind. But when this thought did occur to her, it took root very quickly. And with it came the conviction that it was Aziz, too, who had induced Ralph to permit her to leave Djebl Anaba. She remembered now that Ralph had just had a very long interview with Aziz when he came to tell her that he had reconsidered his decision and was prepared to let her go to England with Lady Saltmarshe. She had been greatly surprised at the time by his sudden change of attitude. But she had asked no questions and she had fallen into the trap that Aziz had prepared for her. For some reason he had desired to get rid of her, perhaps only for a time, and he had said something to induce Ralph to change his mind. Yes; she was quite sure that Aziz had done this. She ought to have questioned Ralph more closely at the time as to the reason for this sudden unexpected decision. Instead of which, she had acquiesced eagerly. Now a new thought presented itself to her. What power, what influence had Aziz over her husband? Was it in any way connected with that mysterious tragedy of whose details she knew nothing? What part had Ralph played when the tragedy of Mahmoud's death had taken place?

Then all her old misgivings returned. . . . What object had Aziz in thus getting rid of her? What motive had he for this intrigue? He was aware of her aversion to him, and perhaps this had made him resentful of her presence in a house where once he had been more than welcome. Perhaps he was inspired by some subtle feeling of jealousy because his friendship for Ralph was a less close one now than it had been before her arrival. . . . But this

motive seemed to her too inadequate, too trivial a thing. She felt quite sure that the Arab had some deep and dangerous reason for keeping her away from Djebl Anaba. Some reason that closely concerned Ralph.

She remembered how it had always seemed to her when she had seen the two men together that Aziz dominated Ralph, and seemed the more powerful, more vigorous character of the two. It had even sometimes occurred to her that Ralph was in some secret way afraid of Aziz. He had begged her not to show her aversion so openly. He had told her that it would offend Aziz if he asked him less often to the house. And she could see for herself that the Arab's visits gave Ralph no pleasure, but made him anxious and worried and irritable. Especially she seemed to remember the sudden shock it had been to Ralph when Lord Saltmarshe had told him that Professor Scudamore was one of the most celebrated of European spiritualists.

At that moment she was so convinced that some positive danger menaced Ralph that she longed that very night to set forth on her journey to Djebl Anaba. Ralph's letter seemed to have lost its power to hurt her. She felt that he had written it under the sway of some powerful potent influence that was also hostile to herself. Never of his own free will would he have written thus to her. Ralph had always been kind and gentle in his dealings with her. And he was not a cruel man.

And if she were making a mistake, and it was really true that he had wearied of her and did not love her any more, she must at least learn it from his own lips. She could not accept the written word. He must be able to look into her eyes and

tell her that he did not love her any more. And if he could do this, she would go away, somewhere where she could hide her wound from curious eyes, and pray that she might die.

But it was not true — it could never be true that Ralph had ceased to love her. She felt now as if her very life depended upon his love.

She would persuade Father Benedict to receive her into the Church as soon as possible, and then she would go home.

It had been madness on her part to go away and leave Ralph alone at Djebl Anaba while Professor Scudamore was still staying at the Five Fountains. This man possessed an enormous, secret, and sinister power, which he did not hesitate to use. And she believed that he was using it now against Ralph. He and Aziz were in league, and she knew that this coalition boded no good to her husband. He was in their hands, in their power, perhaps through some fault of his own in the past.

She felt as if she were pushing her way through thick mists to reach her husband, battling against unseen and menacing intelligences that were bent upon his destruction. And they were trying to keep her from going to his rescue. . . . They had forced him to write this deliberately cruel letter. Many a woman would have been prevented by pride from returning in the face of such a curt and peremptory prohibition. But Pamela's anxiety, as well as her love, triumphed over her pride. Ralph was in great danger, although she was unaware of the precise nature of the peril that threatened him. Nothing could keep her from his side.

She dried her eyes and went downstairs in search of Father Benedict. He knew all the circumstances of her case, and he would certainly be able to advise her. She could confide in him without fear.

Pamela's reception into the Church took place early one morning a few days later in the chapel at East Feddon.

Lady Saltmarshe had risen early to gather fresh white roses and lilies with which to decorate the altar. She and Pamela were both present at Mass, which was said by Father Benedict and served by Rupert Blair. Then followed the little ceremony, so touching in its simplicity, so full of grandeur in its significance. To those who have been through it themselves, it can not but evoke innumerable tender and poignant reminiscences. The confession, the brief profession of faith, the solemn abjuration, the conditional baptism, the absolution, form the little dramatic sequence which admits the convert into that Church against which her Divine Founder promised that the gates of hell should be powerless to prevail.

"Receive this white garment, and see that thou carry it without stain before the Judgment Seat of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that thou mayst have eternal life."

Before Pamela's eyes there was an old crucifix, and as she knelt there she gazed upon that wounded and maimed and tortured Figure hanging upon the cross. . . . Christ, who sanctified and glorified forever pain and suffering by making them His own.

She had come trembling into His service, across a valley of desolation wherein it seemed that she had been surrounded by the hosts of darkness. Now the Inheritance was hers with all its wealth and splendor and majesty.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON the day following her reception into the Church Pamela was sitting at breakfast with Rupert and Lady Saltmarshe when a footman came in to say that Mr. Blair was wanted on the telephone.

Rupert left the dining-room immediately. He did not return. They finished breakfast without him, and then strolled out into the garden. The weather was still superb, and never had East Feddon, with its beautiful grounds and picturesque surroundings, looked more attractive.

An archway literally blazing with crimson ramblers made a fiery patch against the blue and still waters of East Feddon Broad. The lawns dipped green and sloping down to the water's edge. Overhead the sky had the deep, almost fierce blue of Italian skies.

"I wonder what has happened," said Pamela.

She moved slowly toward the cedar trees, and sat down upon a low seat. Lady Saltmarshe followed her example.

"I daresay we shall hear all about it presently," said Nina.

They were both to leave on the following morning. Pamela had simply written to tell Ralph that she was returning at once, and had begged him, if possible, to come and meet her in Tunis, as she found she could reach home more quickly by going to that port. She felt strangely anxious to return to Djebl Anaba. She had ignored Ralph's letter as far as it had been possible to do so, only saying that she had no wish to remain in England, and thought it would be best for them both that she should return without delay.

Rupert meanwhile had left the telephone and had gone in search of Father Benedict.

"I have had a message to say that my stepmother has escaped," he said; "she got out late last night, and they have not been able to trace her at all. They say she has been almost perfectly well for about ten days, and shown no sign of derangement. They are afraid that the nurse was in consequence less on her guard."

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked the priest.

"They think she will in all probability try to find her way back here," said Rupert. "If she does——" He paused.

"You will have to try to keep her under control until they can send for her."

"If she is as well as all that, do you think I ought to send her back?" he said.

"If she is really cured, it will be a very difficult problem," said Father Benedict; "but I do not think you ought to have her here."

"What am I to do about Mrs. Mellish?"

"I should not tell her. She is going away to-morrow morning and so is Lady Saltmarshe."

"But if my stepmother comes?"

"In that case it might be necessary to tell her."

"It will be awful if she comes. I do hope they will find her. I can't bear to think of her roaming about the country alone." His young face wore an anxious, perturbed look. "They ought to have been more careful."

"Perhaps if you were to suggest it to them, Lady Saltmarshe and Mrs. Mellish might go away to-day," said Father Benedict. "I expect you would rather they were not here."

"Much rather," said Rupert. His face brightened a little. "I believe that would be the best

plan. In that case, I might tell them what has happened."

He strolled out into the garden and made his way toward the cedar tree under which his two guests were sitting.

"Rupert, I hope you are going to take us out for a sail," said Lady Saltmarshe, as he approached.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," he said; "and I'm going to be horribly inhospitable and ask you if you would very much mind going away this afternoon instead of to-morrow morning."

"Why, of course we shall do so, if you want us to," said Lady Saltmarshe. "I shall be very sorry, though. What has happened, Rupert?"

"Something," he answered, "that makes it impossible for me to have any one staying here. It is my stepmother. She has escaped, you see — they think she will very likely find her way back here."

"Oh, Rupert — I am so sorry. What an anxiety for you!" said Lady Saltmarshe.

"I hope it won't be very inconvenient for you to change your plans," he said, "especially so suddenly. At first I thought I wouldn't say anything about it. But then it seemed hardly fair — supposing she came — to leave you in ignorance. She may be perfectly well, or she may be violent and uncontrolled. They say she has been extraordinarily well lately. But I wouldn't like you to run the risk of seeing her."

"I shall be very sorry to go," said Pamela, breaking silence for the first time. "I have been very happy here. But I am sure my mother will be glad to have me for one more day. You see, I leave for Marseilles the day after to-morrow."

"I'm glad you were received here," he said simply. "You are the first convert we have had since

I came here for good. We have had one or two among the servants during the last few years, but no one under the new régime. I shall have a resident priest for the mission as soon as I can, and I hope that will increase our numbers. I want East Feddon to be just as it was in my father's lifetime — a Catholic center — almost a little Catholic colony."

"I should like to do that, too, down at Barnton some day, when Cecil retires," said Lady Saltmarshe. "He is already making plans for building a church. It seems rather hard, though, that we should have a new one when the old one really belongs to us."

"I suppose you are not too far from a church in Africa, Mrs. Mellish?" said Rupert.

"The one at the Five Fountains is about two miles away. Ralph can easily motor me in," she answered. "I know the priest very slightly — he is a Frenchman. Nina — I think I had better go in and tell Célestine to pack. What time does the afternoon train leave?"

"There is one at three, so if you leave here at half-past two you will be in plenty of time," said Rupert. "I will order the motor. I am most awfully sorry about it, you know," he added in a tone of contrition. "I wish it hadn't happened just now."

"You are the one to be pitied, Rupert," said Lady Saltmarshe. "However, I hope they will be able to find her, poor thing."

"Yes — that is the worst part of it — this not knowing where she is," he said slowly. "I am hoping she will find her way here — she will be safe, at least."

It was a very warm and still night, and there was a bright, almost full moon, that shone upon East

Feddon Broad until it seemed to be painted in tones of black and silver, and shone like a flat and luminous shield.

It was very silent. Now and then the hoarse cry of some water-fowl broke the stillness with abrupt violence. From the garden there stole countless scented perfumes, odors of rose and mignonette and stocks, freshened with the delicate falling dew. On the lawn the cedars stood motionless, their flat black boughs etched against the pallid, moon-washed sky.

Rupert Blair sat alone on the terrace, smoking. Near him there was a small table on which stood a siphon, a decanter, some tumblers, and a box of cigarettes. He wondered if Father Benedict would join him before turning in for the night.

Evidently the events of the day had filled Rupert with anxiety. He had been sorry, too, to have to ask his guests to depart, he had liked having them. But he had not thought it fair to them to let them remain. He had a very strong conviction that his stepmother would elude her pursuers and find her way back to East Feddon. She had been gone many months now, and the thought of her return was extremely disturbing. A meeting with her could not prove otherwise than painful.

Suddenly the door-bell rang. The loud, clanging, metallic sound echoed through the old house. There had not been any sound of wheels to herald the approach of a carriage or motor. Rupert rose quickly, and went indoors. He ran quickly across the library into the hall.

A footman had just opened the big door, and on the threshold he could see a woman's form, dressed in white and hatless. As he came nearer she lifted her face so that the sharp electric light fell full upon it, and he saw it was his stepmother.

"Rupert!" she said.

She came toward him with quick, uncertain footsteps.

"Rupert. . . . I have come back."

"Please come in, mother," he said, taking her hand.

He felt as he did so that she trembled.

"Are you not going to kiss me, Rupert?" she said.

She put up her face. He stooped and kissed her lightly on the forehead. He noticed that her face was very white and puffy — almost swollen-looking. There was no trace now of the fresh, bright kind of beauty she had once possessed.

"Say you are glad to see me," she said, almost pitifully.

"But you shouldn't have come so late," he said hurriedly. "Your room isn't ready. And what have you done with your hat?"

Her hair hung in disordered wisps around her face, and one strand had freed itself and had fallen over her shoulder.

"I must have forgotten my hat," she said, putting up her hand to her head, and regarding him with a vague smile; "but I can easily send for it in the morning. I am very tired, Rupert."

"You had better come upstairs, then," he said, "and I'll tell them to get a room ready for you."

He turned to the footman, who was staring open-mouthed.

"Please tell Mrs. Marching to come to me," he said.

"Oh, I don't want old Marching!" said Mrs. Blair.

Rupert made no reply. Taking her hand, he led her upstairs, and when she tried to free herself his fingers grasped hers more firmly.

As he turned down the corridor, she said:

"That isn't the way to my room."

"Oh, that isn't your room any more. When you went away I had everything changed. . . ."

She stopped and turned to him with sudden fierceness.

"How dared you touch my room, Rupert? I had always had that one!" Her eyes gleamed dangerously.

"It wanted papering and painting," he said coldly. "Come this way, mother."

"Where are you taking me? I always disliked being at all near the chapel. I won't go near the chapel, Rupert!"

"I am not taking you anywhere near it." He threw open a door and switched on the electric light.

"Mrs. Marching will see that it is put ready for you," he said quietly. "You see, you've come late. I suppose most of the servants have gone to bed. We didn't expect you."

An odd, vague look came into her blue eyes.

"I must have dreamt it," she said, "but I certainly thought I had been away from East Feddon for a very long time. Months — perhaps even years. I dreamed that you and Father Benedict had sent me away. I've been living in such a horrid place in my dreams. Such an ugly house and garden. I simply hated it."

She brushed her hand across her eyes, as if even those memories were growing dim.

"Is Billy Mowbray here?"

"No."

"Nor Pamela Winton?"

"She went away to-day. She is Mrs. Mellish now."

"Oh, did she marry? And Mrs. Silva? What has become of Mrs. Silva?"

"I have heard nothing of Mrs. Silva."

"That's very strange. She ought to have written."

She smiled in a foolish, meaningless way. Then she went to the glass and began to arrange her hair.

"It is true that Edmund is dead? I didn't dream that too?"

"My father has been dead five years."

"He came and spoke to me last night," said Mrs. Blair; "he urged me not to stay in that house any more — he said he wanted me to come back to East Feddon. You know I spoke to him always, every day. Only they wouldn't let me — they didn't like my doing it. It was very cruel of them."

Mrs. Marching knocked at the door. Rupert gave her a few orders about the room. While it was being prepared, he took his stepmother into the adjoining dressing-room. She sat down in a big armchair, looking rather exhausted.

"You must be very tired," he said: "did you walk far?"

"Only from the station. I came by train. I wondered why you didn't send the car for me. It is a long walk."

"You didn't tell me you were coming," said Rupert.

"I was afraid they might prevent me. In my dream there were a great many people who were all in league to prevent me from coming back to East Feddon. So I knew if they found out I meant to come they would try and stop me. You won't let them come and take me away?"

She seized his hands and held them in a rough, almost brutal clasp.

"No, of course, I won't, mother," he said reassuringly; "you are quite safe here."

"You're sure of that? I began to think you were an enemy."

"No — I'm not an enemy."

He looked at her sadly.

"Have you got long leave this time?" she asked.

"I'm not in the Army any more. I retired some months ago."

She looked at him inattentively.

"Was Pamela much hurt?" she asked.

"No . . . she wasn't hurt."

"I thought at the time she was making a fuss about nothing."

Rupert was silent. She was screwing up her face, and it had now assumed the old, obstinate, mulish look.

"And Father Benedict? I hope you have got rid of him."

"He is staying here," said Rupert.

"You mustn't tell him I'm here. He doesn't like me. It was all his fault that I went away, and had to live in that horrid house, with the ugly garden and the tiresome people who never left me alone for a second."

"You went there because — because you were not well," said Rupert patiently.

"Father Benedict never liked me after I joined the spiritualists. But they are right and he is wrong. I saw that always from the beginning. Edmund was the first to warn me against becoming a Catholic; he said that if I became one I shouldn't be allowed to communicate with him any more, and that it would be cruel to him as well as to me."

She spoke in a very hurried, indistinct way that sounded unnatural, almost as if she were speaking in her sleep.

"Mother — that should have proved to you that it wasn't my father speaking."

"But I saw him, Rupert. Of course, it was Edmund. He was delighted to see me again."

She drummed with her fingers on the window-sill.

"I am glad to be back, although I don't like this room. It isn't sympathetic."

"Well, you mustn't mind it for one night," he said.

"One night? What do you mean, Rupert? I'm not going away again. I'm going to stay here. I'm going to live at East Feddon. That dream of the dreadful house and all those strange people is quite over. I shall never go back there. Don't let Father Benedict send me back."

"I meant . . . you could have another room to-morrow," said Rupert. "I never meant that you were to go away."

There was compassion in his eyes as they rested upon this pitiable wreck of what had once been a charming and kindly woman.

She moved her chair a little and leaned out of the window.

"How bright the water looks to-night, with the moon shining upon it," she said. "I should like to go for a walk in the garden."

"Not to-night," he said hastily, "you are much too tired. Mrs. Marching is waiting to help you to go to bed. You must have a good night's rest."

She yawned. "Yes — I'm very tired," she said; "I've come a long way to-day." She rose and followed him into the bedroom, where Mrs. Marching was standing awaiting her. The expression on the housekeeper's face was somewhat suggestive of alarm. There had been something mysterious about Mrs. Blair's illness, and the gossip that had reached her ears from time to time had not been of a reassuring nature. Still, she was prepared to do her

duty. Rupert in his short reign had won the devotion and loyalty of all the servants at East Feddon; he could count upon their obedience and help.

Mrs. Blair looked from one to the other.

"Will there be Mass in the morning?" she asked her stepson.

"Yes," he said.

"I don't want to hear the bell," she said; "tell them not to ring it very loud. It — it disturbs me."

"I hope you will have your breakfast in bed," he said, "Take a good rest."

"It depends on so many things. If Edmund comes and tells me to go for a walk in the garden I shall have to go."

"You mustn't go in the garden to-night, mother."

"But I like looking at the moon on the water."

"You can look at it to-morrow night. Good night."

He stooped and kissed her on the forehead.

Then he drew Mrs. Marching aside.

"I want you to sleep in the dressing-room," he said, "and call me if she wants anything. I am going now to telephone for the doctor."

An hour later the doctor arrived and administered a sedative to Mrs. Blair. He thought this would give her a good and quiet night, and relieve Rupert from all anxiety. But he was obliged to go away again, owing to the dangerous illness of one of his patients.

The dawn had just stolen into Rupert's room, vaguely outlining the window square and the furniture, when he heard a knock at the door. He had not been asleep long, for he had felt very anxious, and he awoke instantly and sprang out of bed.

Mrs. Marching, an odd, amorphous figure, wearing a nightcap, stood in the passage without.

"Please, sir — I'm very sorry, but she has gone out. . . . I was asleep, and didn't hear her."

Rupert threw on a coat and thrust his feet into a pair of slippers. Without a word he ran downstairs into the garden.

Down at the end of the lawn, standing close to the water's edge, he could discern the figure of a woman, white-clad, bending down and dipping her hand into East Feddon Broad.

There was a white and thick mist over the horizon. In the garden the tall, white lilies, standing in serried rows, had all the aspect of ghost-flowers. The scent of the wet earth, and the flowers drenched still with the dews of that summer night, was deliciously fresh. Rupert could remember it afterward as an insignificant detail that seemed an inalienable part of the tragedy which immediately followed.

He trod softly in his swift flight across the lawn, fearing to disturb her. As he drew nearer he could hear that she was speaking in a low monologue, fast and incoherent. She lifted up her hand and let the drops of water fall back into the lake, just as a child will do.

Suddenly she turned her head and saw Rupert coming toward her. There was no time for him to slacken speed, nor to speak to her reassuringly. Mrs. Blair threw up her arms, with a shrill scream that seemed to echo eerily across that white waste of water. Then she plunged boldly into the lake, flinging herself head first into its deep waters. Whether she struck her head against the branch of a submerged tree, or against some chance stone lying at the bottom of the lake, it was impossible to say. But when Rupert dived in and brought her to the surface, the body offered no resistance. At that point the water was very deep, and he had

some difficulty in bringing her ashore, although he was a powerful and practised swimmer. He laid his dripping burden upon the lawn and tried to restore her by artificial respiration. All his efforts, however, were quite useless. He was soon joined by Father Benedict and some of the servants, roused by Mrs. Marching from sleep. By the time they arrived Mrs. Blair was already dead. . . .

CHAPTER XXVIII

RALPH did not meet his wife when she arrived in Tunis, but she found a telegram from him awaiting her, telling her that he would send the car for her to St. Augustin and, if possible, would try to come in it himself.

It chilled her a little that he should allow any other concern to stand in the way of meeting her. Nor did he give any excuse for not coming.

At St. Augustin André met her with the motor, but still no Ralph. The second disappointment wounded her, if possible, more sharply than the first. She felt tired and dispirited as she got into the car, leaving Célestine to sit outside with the chauffeur. She felt that she wanted to be alone. And Célestine had not been a very agreeable companion during the journey; she was not a good traveler, and the process always tried her temper. Although she had not actually complained, Pamela felt sure that she was thoroughly disgusted at having to return to Djebl Anaba during the summer.

The dusk was falling over the purple African mountains when the car came to the little village of the Five Fountains. Soon they were actually turning into the road that led to Djebl Anaba.

To the right as they left the village Pamela could

discern the closely growing trees enclosing the great, arrogant palace that belonged to Aziz. The tower of it was just visible, a white blot against the darkening sky. And farther away, low on the plain to the west, at the foot of the hill that gave it its name, she could see a few lights pricking the dusk from the village of Djebl Anaba lying in its setting of palms. She strained forward to catch the first glimpse of her home.

It lay there luminous and as if carven in ivory on a lower slope of the mountain, against a background of dark, mysterious forest that grew thickly on three sides of it. The road along which the car was slipping with such rapidity cut through Ralph's own vineyards. It shone like a pale silver ribbon. All the mystery, the haunting beauty, the peace of Africa, of its wide solitudes, its empty spaces, seemed to enfold her as never before. She felt an almost rapturous joy in it. She understood, as never before, Ralph's passionate love for his beautiful home.

"I am coming back," she said aloud, exultantly.

Back to Djebl Anaba . . . back to Ralph. How could she ever have left them? She had been so glad to go away. But now her supreme gladness mocked at that other joy which had been so careless of happiness.

Yet perhaps it had been as well to know this trial of separation. It had taught her many things. And she was coming back to Ralph fortified with a new strength, a new wisdom. . . . She, the seeker, had found. She had knocked, and the door had been opened to her.

When she came to the gates she saw that Ralph was standing there in an attitude of listless expectation. The car stopped and she sprang out before he could prevent her. Even in that dim light she

could see a terrible change in him. He was so altered that at first she could hardly believe that it was he. He was thin to emaciation; his dark eyes burned feverishly in their hollow sockets. When he touched her as she alighted she felt that the deadly fire of fever was burning in his wasted hands.

"You shouldn't have come," he muttered. "I told you not to come. . . ."

"Oh, Ralph — you are ill!" she cried impulsively.

He held her closely, kissing her.

"No — not now ——" he said. "I have been ill. That's past." He stood gazing into her face, apparently heedless of the presence of the chauffeur and the maid.

"I suppose we had better get in and go on to the house," he said at last.

He got into the motor and sat beside her, still holding her hand as if to assure himself that she was really there. All the way to the house he did not speak, but his hand clasped hers with that dreadful burning touch.

"You never told me that you had been ill, Ralph," she said at last, when they entered the house and had gone upstairs into the library.

He took her in his arms and, bending his head, kissed her once, and then almost abruptly released her.

"I didn't want you to know. Where was the use of spoiling your pleasure?" he said in an odd, restrained voice that seemed to have lost something of its customary softness. It had the hoarseness, almost gruffness, of the voice of a person who has become very weak through protracted illness and can no longer modulate his tones.

As he spoke, he looked at her almost critically. How well she looked, how radiantly happy.

"It was very good of you to come back — in spite of my letter," he said.

"Oh, Ralph — you shouldn't have written like that. It made me miserable. I felt ——"

"Yes? What did you feel, Pamela?"

"That you didn't want me — that you didn't perhaps care any more."

"You must have known I didn't mean that."

"It wasn't true, then — that you would rather I had stayed in England?"

"For your own sake," he said, "for your own sake."

"Oh, Ralph — you can't think how happy I was when I came in sight of Djebl Anaba. I wondered how I could have stayed away so long — how I could ever have left you."

He looked at her almost incredulously.

"You didn't come, then, because you felt it to be your duty?" he said.

The words chilled her a little. Had he endeavored during her absence to persuade himself that she did not care for him any more?

"Why, of course I didn't, Ralph!" she said.

"You were not very happy here. You were full of nervous fears."

He spoke almost reluctantly.

"I don't mean to have them any more. I'm beginning to love Africa — as you love it, Ralph. I was homesick for its hot sun — its wide spaces."

"And so you have come back to the cage," he said, with a strange little smile.

"Yes," she said; "I was almost afraid I should find the door shut, so that I couldn't come in. . . ."

He took her hand and lifted it to his lips.

"My door is always open to you, Pamela," he said.

She noticed how thin and yellow and shriveled his

hand was. A sudden thought occurred to her.

"Is — is Professor Scudamore still staying at the Five Fountains?" she asked.

Ralph dropped her hand.

"I do not know — I have not seen him," he said in rather a loud voice, as if he wished to emphasize his words. "I did not care for what I saw of Professor Scudamore. He struck me as being a very dangerous man. Unscrupulous and dangerous," he added. There was something almost violent in his manner of speaking.

If Pamela had expected Ralph to share her own softened and tender mood, she must have been bitterly disappointed. He was like a man grown morose and suspicious through living much alone and brooding upon some real or imagined wrong. His somber eyes were heavy and sunken with fever; at times they were dull and almost colorless, and at times they seemed aflame like live coals. He looked ill, and he had the irritable, petulant manner of the convalescent. Pamela's heart sank as she looked at him. She had come back to a man changed beyond belief. This new mood was unlike any of Ralph's former ones with which she was acquainted. It was quite as inexplicable as any of those she had hitherto encountered, and it filled her with a very definite anxiety on her husband's account. What had he been doing here during those long weeks he had spent alone at Djebl Anaba? He had been ill — perhaps more ill than he had said, and he had never told her. She was glad to think now that she had not wasted any time in England; she had returned to Africa as soon as the object of her visit had been accomplished.

"I was so disappointed when you didn't come to Tunis," she said presently, as they sat by the window in the library.

"You might have known that only illness would have prevented me. I felt too weak to make such a long journey. And I was afraid of getting ill again while I was there."

"Have you seen a doctor?"

"My dear Pamela — I can take quinine without asking a doctor's advice."

"I should be happier about you if you would see one," she said. "What was the matter with you, Ralph? Was it — just fever?" She put the question almost timidly.

"Why do you want to know?" he said angrily. "Why should you be so curious about it?"

For the moment she thought he must have been drinking, so odd and changed did he seem to her then. It would have explained many things that had seemed to her unusual and mysterious about him; his moodiness, his moroseness, a demeanor that at one moment was languid and indifferent and at the next was almost ferocious. Sometimes he had appeared almost dulled, as if some temporary obscurity had descended upon his mind, clouding it. Pamela had no personal experience of these things, but she had read many novels which dealt with the victims of drugs and of drink, and she wondered if Ralph had fallen a victim to these habits.

It seemed, too, as if he greatly disliked speaking of his illness, whether from a wish to diminish her concern and anxiety upon his account, or because he was irritated, as strong men often are, at any betrayal of their own physical weakness.

She rose and, just before leaving the room, turned and approached him impulsively.

"Ralph!" she said.

He looked up. Her eyes were wet with tears. She bent down and put her lips to his, clasping his face in her hands.

"You are glad — you are not sorry — that I have come back?" she said.

His only answer was to take her in his arms and kiss her with all the old passion. When at last he released her she saw that his eyes were shining as if with unshed tears.

CHAPTER XXIX

In the days that followed Ralph never mentioned Aziz, and Pamela wondered if, for some reason or other, an end had come to their friendship. She did not like, however, to refer to the subject which before her departure for England had once or twice led to discussion and disagreement. But she could not help hoping that Aziz had ceased his visits to Djebl Anaba.

About a week after her return she went up to her room one morning, and found Célestine putting away some of her things which had just been mended. To her surprise, as she looked at her, she saw that the maid's eyes were red with weeping.

"Why, what is the matter, Célestine?" she asked.

"Madame, I am very sorry, but I can not stay here. I shall have to leave."

"To leave?" echoed Pamela in astonishment.

Célestine had been with her for several years, and she could not imagine any reason she could have for wishing to leave her service. In spite of her odd and uncertain temper the girl had always seemed entirely devoted to her.

"Why do you wish to leave, Célestine?" she asked.

"I — I do not care for Djebl Anaba, Madame."

There was something definite and final in her tone.

"Why don't you like it? Is it too dull?"

"I do not complain of the dullness, Madame."

"I shall be sorry if you go away, Célestine," said Pamela.

"And I shall be sorry — broken-hearted — to leave, Madame. Had Madame remained in England I should not have wished to leave her — ever. But now — I must go at the end of my month." She said this in a dogged, obstinate tone, as if she did not wish to discuss the matter further.

Pamela, however, said a little persistently:

"I wish you would tell me why you don't like it here, Célestine."

The maid looked at her as if she were trying to think of some reason that was at once adequate and sufficiently probable. After a moment's hesitation, she said:

"It does not suit my health, Madame."

"Oh, I am so sorry if you have been feeling ill," said Pamela; "you should have told me."

"It does not suit my health here," repeated the woman obstinately. Pamela felt now quite certain that she did not wish to argue the point or to give any further reason. She said nothing more, and presently Célestine left the room.

At dinner that night Pamela told her husband of Célestine's decision.

"I am afraid you will have some difficulty in replacing her here," he said. "You will have to inquire in Algiers and in Tunis, and failing that we shall have to send to Paris for another. I wonder what has made her discontented? I suppose she is dull without shops and boulevards."

"She says it does not agree with her health," said Pamela, "and I am beginning to think maids are rather a trouble in a place like this. I shall try to

do without one for the present, and get a Frenchwoman from the Five Fountains to come sometimes to do my sewing."

"Oh, I don't think you will be able to do without a maid, Pamela! You would be without any other woman here. Supposing you were ill."

"Oh, I don't mean to be ill!" she said lightly.

The worried expression in Ralph's face was now greatly emphasized.

"I think, under the circumstances, you had really better spend the summer in England, Pamela — I can see no other way out of the difficulty."

"But there isn't any difficulty," she assured him.

Ralph laid down his knife and fork.

"Pamela, you are really very capricious. When I wanted you to stay here you almost made yourself ill with fretting to go home. Now I suggest that it would be better for you to spend the summer in England you are equally obstinate about remaining here."

"Don't you remember that I said England might teach me to be homesick for Djebl Anaba?" she said quickly.

"And is that what it did?" he said.

His great dark eyes sought hers almost wistfully.

"Yes," she said softly; "I went because I wanted to become a Catholic. Now I don't ever want to go away again. I can't bear leaving you alone. And you were ill — and you didn't tell me. You won't even tell me about your illness — how long you were ill — whether you suffered very much. You are getting," and she smiled, "almost as mysterious and secretive as — as the Arabs."

To her astonishment — for she had spoken the words lightly and almost in jest — Ralph rose from his seat. His face was of an ashen pallor that accentuated the dark brightness of his strange eyes;

there were faint drops of moisture about his brow, about his mouth.

"Don't talk like that, Pamela!" he exclaimed violently. He almost shouted the words. "You mustn't say such things — even in fun!"

She had a moment's dreadful fear that the fever had not quite left him; he looked like a man in delirium. There was something strange and mysterious about him now. She shrank before him, terrified and alarmed at this sudden uncontrolled outburst. She thought she had never seen him so angry before. Her heart sank a little. Had his illness affected his mind?

"There is nothing," he asserted vehemently, "for me to be mysterious about. I have nothing to hide!"

He sat down once more at the table and hid his face in his hands. It was as if he were making a strong, almost passionate effort to control himself.

When he looked up he said:

"I really think it will be better for you to go home when Célestine goes. Evidently Djebl Anaba is an unsuitable place for women."

"But I don't wish to go away again, Ralph. I have only just come back. I shall think," she looked at him now with reproach, "I shall think you want to get rid of me."

She thought to herself:

"Célestine is afraid as I used to be afraid; and that is why she wants to go away, although she does not say so."

She did not dare utter this suspicion to her husband. He was not in a mood when she could speak frankly to him. She was afraid of again arousing that sudden, violent anger.

They went on with their meal in silence. When it was over, Ralph said:

"I think we will have our coffee in your sitting-room to-night, Pamela."

As a rule they had it either in the library or on the balcony outside, for the nights were now very warm.

"Very well, Ralph."

Her face must have shown some surprise for he said immediately:

"I suppose you will want to know why. Well, I am expecting Aziz this evening."

Pamela had made a very strong resolution that she would offer no further objection to the Arab's visits. She thought by accepting them without remonstrance she would promote peace between herself and Ralph. This had really been their principal cause of disagreement before she left for England.

As she made no remark, Ralph continued:

"There has been some trouble among the Arabs, and he sent word that he wished to talk it over with me." He looked at her squarely and added: "I am sorry he chose this evening. I prefer him to come in the morning."

He spoke mechanically, like a child repeating a lesson he had learned by heart. Pamela felt perfectly convinced that he was not speaking the truth, and that he desired to hide the real motive of Aziz's visit from her. She had one of those swift intuitions which often enable women to leap to the very heart of a truth.

"What — what kind of trouble?" she asked carelessly.

"Oh, the usual kind of thing — a dispute about some flocks. I believe there was a fight and one man was badly stabbed. I really don't know the exact particulars. I haven't seen Aziz yet."

He followed her up to her sitting-room. When

they had had their coffee and cigarettes, Ralph rose and kissed his wife.

"Good night, Pamela — you are looking tired. I think you had better go to bed early. Aziz always stays rather a long time. I need not ask you not to disturb us this evening."

"I won't disturb you," she said a little haughtily.

About an hour later she heard a motor approaching the house. She drew aside the curtain and peered out into the darkness. The hall lamp cast only a faint radiance over the big black mass of the car with its two gleaming lights. Some one stood there in the shadows. She could just discern Aziz's figure, tall, majestic, turbaned. Then, as she watched, she saw another figure slip stealthily from the car. She was perfectly certain that she had not been mistaken, and she let the curtain drop hastily across the window and shrank back trembling into the room.

No — she could not have been mistaken. The second figure was Professor Scudamore.

What could it mean? Ralph had said he did not know if the Professor was still staying at the Five Fountains. She had asked him the question on the day of her return home, and that had been his answer. She remembered now how convinced she had been that he was lying to her as to the purpose of Aziz's visit. Now the sight of the Professor's small and sinister figure filled her with renewed misgiving and apprehension; it awoke to life, indeed, all those dormant fears that she had endeavored with so much resolution to silence.

She saw in the Professor now a vital force and power employed only and wholly in the cause of evil. This small and insignificant-looking man had

surrendered himself body and soul to the service of those legions of darkness, with whom he was in perpetual communication. Why was he there? Was he intent upon dragging Ralph into his nets? Ralph had expressed so much horror of these necromantic arts that if he had fallen a victim to them Pamela felt assured that he was also an unwilling one.

What was passing in the library? What were those three men doing there? Was the Professor at work — beckoning to those Watchers at the Gate?

She felt sick with fear and apprehension. She could not sit here alone. And then she remembered Ralph's request that she would not disturb them in the library. She rang the bell twice — her invariable method of summoning Célestine. Even the presence of her discontented maid would be preferable to sitting here alone.

The woman, however, did not come. Perhaps she was having her supper. Pamela had never known her to delay so long before. After a little interval Pamela rang again. This time the bell was answered by Ralph's English valet, Robinson, a man who disliked Célestine.

"I rang for my maid," she said, "please tell her to come at once."

"She can't come, ma'am," he said, suppressing a yawn.

"Why not?" said Pamela irritably.

"She's not here, ma'am."

"Not here? What do you mean?"

"She's gone away, ma'am — almost directly after you had gone in to dinner. She got André to take her in the car. She was to catch the night train for Tunis at St. Augustin."

"Do you mean she has left like that — without a word? Why did no one come and tell me?"

"She didn't tell any one, ma'am. I didn't know it myself until just now. Only the Arab knew who helped André to get the car ready."

"André will probably be dismissed for taking her," said Pamela.

The man gave a faint smile.

"He won't care for that, ma'am. He is not set on the place. And he'll be wanting to go back to France now Célestine has gone. They have been engaged these last three months."

"Do you know why she has gone?"

Robinson's face became suddenly blank and quite devoid of expression.

"I'm sure I couldn't say, ma'am."

"She gave me notice this evening — to leave at the end of her month. Was there any reason why she should wish to leave at once?"

"She was a little excited when I last saw her to-night, ma'am. I could see she wasn't quite herself. She said something I didn't rightly catch. Something about a *maison hantée.*"

He spoke reluctantly.

Another thought occurred to her. Did this man know more than she did of what was passing in this house of mystery?

"Robinson," she said suddenly, "when I was away in England your master tells me he was ill."

"Yes, ma'am."

"He was really very ill? Worse, perhaps, than he has told me?"

"I can't say, ma'am," replied the man guardedly.

"You fetched the doctor?"

"Yes, ma'am. That was one night when he seemed very bad indeed. I don't think he ever knew the doctor had been here."

"A French doctor?"

"Yes, ma'am. I sent André to St. Augustin to fetch him."

"Did he give him something to — to quiet him?"

She waited trembling for the answer.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Were you there, Robinson?"

"Yes, ma'am. I didn't leave him."

"You stayed with him, perhaps, all night?"

The man again assented.

"Was — was it necessary, Robinson?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am — he couldn't be left. The fever made him violent."

"And the doctor? Did he stay, too, Robinson?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Was it — so necessary?"

"Yes, ma'am. I thought the doctor seemed a little puzzled about the case."

"Puzzled? Why should he be puzzled about an attack of fever?"

"It was such a violent attack, ma'am. It seemed almost —" He hesitated.

"Almost?" said Pamela.

"Almost as if he were out of his mind, ma'am. It took the two of us to hold him down when he tried to get up out of bed."

Pamela's face was very pale.

"How long did it last?" she said.

"He was only very bad that one night. But he was ill for a fortnight altogether. He was very exhausted after the attack."

"You should have sent for me."

The man was silent.

"Next time — if it should ever happen again — you must telegraph for me."

"Yes, ma'am."

"That is all, thank you, Robinson."

The man withdrew respectfully.

And again Pamela felt that she was beating her hands against a barrier in vain. Every one — even Robinson — even perhaps Célestine — was in league to hide the truth from her.

And now Célestine had gone. Perhaps she had not wished to be questioned. What had she meant by saying that the house was haunted? Had she seen anything — heard anything? Or had Marcelle, long ago at East Feddon, told her something about Professor Scudamore?

Pamela felt more than ever alone. She was the only woman now at Djebl Anaba. The fears that she had been trying to keep in check all the evening took possession of her with a fierce insistence. She longed to go to the library and confront those three men — her husband and Aziz and Professor Scudamore.

She took out her rosary and began to say the prayers, thinking it would distract her mind a little and sooth her. She lay upon the divan, and put a small table with an electric lamp upon it close to her side. When she had finished saying her rosary she took up a book and began to read. She felt that it was impossible to go to bed. She must wait for Ralph to come back to her. As the hours wore on she found herself praying that he might come soon.

CHAPTER XXX

It was long after midnight when at last she heard Ralph's step coming slowly along the passage. She heard him go softly toward his dressing-room, as if for fear of disturbing her. She rose and threw open the door.

"Ralph!" she cried sharply.

The passage was in darkness; he had switched off the lights as he made his way to his room.

He threw open the door of his room. He was in his shirt-sleeves.

"My dear Pamela — I thought you were in bed hours ago. How you startled me!"

"I could not go to bed. I knew I should not sleep. And I have something to tell you."

"Well, what is it? Wouldn't it have kept till to-morrow?"

"No — I wanted to tell you to-night. Célestine has gone."

"Gone?" he repeated. "Where has she gone to? I do not understand."

"She has gone away," said Pamela.

"How on earth did she go?"

"Robinson told me she went with André who took her in the car. She was to catch the night train at St. Augustin for Tunis. I do not know if André has come back yet."

"I shall dismiss André at once. I wonder what made him do such a thing? He has the strictest orders never to take the car out without leave."

"Robinson told me that André was engaged to Célestine. She must have persuaded him to take her. I wonder why she was in such a hurry to go?"

Both Ralph and Pamela wore white, tense, troubled faces.

"Ralph," she said, desperately, "do you know of any reason for her wishing not to stay at Djebl Anaba?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What reason could there possibly be? I suppose she's sick of it," he answered.

"What a long time Aziz stayed," said Pamela.

"Yes. I couldn't get rid of him. But I'm sorry you sat up." He put his hands on her shoulders

and, stooping, kissed her. "You must be very tired. We must look out for another maid as soon as possible. That woman has behaved very badly in leaving you in the lurch like this. Good night, Pamela."

Pamela went to her room and began to unfasten her hair. It was very long and thick and hung down her back like a great dark curtain. Célestine had always brushed it for her, and she had never been accustomed to perform this task for herself. It tired her, and she very soon laid down the brush and began to plait the heavy strands of hair. Yes, she would miss Célestine very much. She wondered why she had gone like this, without a word. And now André was going. He had simply courted dismissal by his action. Robinson would be the only European left in the house except herself and Ralph. And Ralph had spoken of sending her home.

She spent a restless, sleepless night, the rosary still clasped in her fingers.

In the morning she did not get up early, and she did not see Ralph until she went into the library a little before their midday breakfast.

Ralph was sitting at the table writing. As she came in he looked up.

"I've packed André off," he said, "he was very rude and insulting when I gave him notice, so I would not let him stay another day!"

"Oh, Ralph, what shall we do when we want to go anywhere?"

"I shall drive the car myself," he answered. "After all, I nearly always do."

"But if you were ill again, I should have no one to send to fetch the doctor."

"If I am ill I do not wish to have a doctor."

"I wish you could have kept André until you had found another man."

"My dear, there are limits. And I am sure I shall easily get some one to replace him. What a bore these domestic worries are! I think Célestine must have turned his head — she has upset the whole household. I thought she was a really reliable person."

"So she always seemed to me. I can't think what came over her. I thought she was really attached to me."

"I am afraid we must blame Djebl Anaba," he said lightly.

Outside there was a day of brilliant, burning heat; the very air seemed to quiver and scintillate in that blistering, golden sunlight. To go near an open window was to receive a sensation of approaching a fiery furnace. The sky was of a deep, warm blue, and seemed to be suspended high above the world like a splendid sapphire dome, so fiercely bright that it was almost impossible to look up at it. No clouds broke its surface. Even the white glare from the garden terraces, where the masses of rambler roses, crimson, pink and white, hung in trailing clusters, hurt Pamela's eyes. Beyond, the green glades of the forest looked shady and reposeful.

"If she had only had a little more patience she might have learned to love it — as I love it," said Pamela softly.

Ralph looked at her almost incredulously.

"Do you really love it, Pamela?" he said.

"So much that I feel I never want to leave it."

"It might be necessary — absolutely necessary — for you to go away," he said in a constrained voice.

She linked her arm in his.

"What could possibly make it necessary?"

"Many things. I couldn't risk your health — here in the great heat."

"But it suits you all right. Why shouldn't I be able to bear it, too?"

"You have never been baked and boiled in the tropics as I have."

"Anyhow, we needn't talk about it until I show signs of flagging, Ralph," she said gravely.

"I suppose you will want to go to Mass to-morrow," he said reflectively. "I shall drive you over to the Five Fountains. And we could bring the priest back to breakfast afterward if you like."

"That will be very kind of you," she said.

Presently he said:

"Has your religion given you all that you hoped it would?"

"All and more," she said.

Had it not banished forever the Watcher from the Gate?

She added timidly:

"I wish you would try to follow my example. I wish we could be alike in this."

He looked at her with eyes that seemed to her both sorrowful and infinitely tender.

"I could never follow you," he said; "there are things that stand in the way."

She said simply:

"When one has the faith it is wonderful how all obstacles seem to melt away — to become insignificant."

"You must believe me, Pamela, when I tell you that for me it is impossible. But I am very glad that you have chosen to be a Catholic. I like you to be one. And for you it must have been very easy. Even your first confession — that stumbling block of so many converts — must have been easy."

"Yes, it wasn't difficult. And priests always make it as easy as they can. Father Benedict helped me a great deal. And it is such a little price

to pay, even if it is very hard — even if one has been very wicked . . . even for those who have always gone against God."

Ralph made no comment, but his eyes were fastened upon hers.

"Such a little price to pay for the grace given in return; for the wonderful peace of absolution."

"You little saint!" he said, laughing in a kind of embarrassed way; "are you trying to proselytize already?"

"No — but of course one always wants to share one's treasure with — with those one loves, Ralph."

"Even when one loves some one unworthy?"

"Not unworthy," she said softly. "I'd give worlds to see you safely in the Church."

He was silent.

"I should like you to know Father Benedict."

"Perhaps I shall one of these days — when we are back in England. I should like to meet him. Saltmarshe spoke of him as being a very able, cultivated man."

"Yes, and he is more than that. He is very holy, very devout. He has given himself completely to the service of God. You can't help feeling that about him. He seems quite detached from the world — entirely selfless in his absolute surrender."

"Life and death must be very simple things to a man like that," said Ralph thoughtfully. "He has probably never been into — into the outer darkness. He can have no conception at all what it is like — for the soul that is still there!"

"I think he would understand," she said, though his words gave her a chill little feeling of fear; "I think he must have rescued many from that darkness."

Had he not intervened and fought, as it were, face to face with the Watchers at the Gate? Had

he not perhaps heard their cry, as his Divine Master had done before him:

"Our name is Legion, for we are many?"

And for those who ultimately resisted grace, was there not at last the precipice and the deep sea?

"I shall send Robinson over this afternoon to find out what time Mass will be," he said, moving toward the door.

But as he went out she heard him repeat her own words softly to himself:

"Even for those who have always gone against God."

Robinson returned later in the day with news to the effect that the priest at the Five Fountains was ill with an attack of fever, and that he would be unable to say Mass the next day. Seeing his wife's disappointment, Ralph suggested that they should make an early start and go in to St. Augustin, which was some twenty miles away by road.

"You are sure it isn't too far for you, Ralph?" she said, a little anxiously. Although he never complained, she felt dissatisfied about his health, especially after what Robinson had told her of his illness.

"Of course it isn't too far," he said, smiling. "But you will have to be ready at seven."

"I shall be quite ready."

On the way to St. Augustin Pamela sat by his side on the front seat of the car. Ralph was a very experienced driver, and he knew the roads even better than André. Both he and his wife wore yellow goggles, for the glare from the white road was terrific. Africa was beginning to look parched and brown from the excessive heat.

St. Augustin was a little port where once the great saint had lived and preached. It was a charm-

ing town with wide boulevards shaded by palm trees and acacias. Great mountains protected the bay. One of them, the Rocher de Lion, possessed a fanciful shape that simulated the immense profile of a lion's head, curiously silhouetted against the sky.

Ralph accompanied his wife to Mass, and when it was over he left her at the rectory, as she had said that she wished to make the acquaintance of the priest.

She found an elderly man, very thin, very brown, as if from long years spent under the fierce heat of the African sun. He greeted her kindly, and briefly she told him the story of her conversion. She told him, too, the events which had led up to it. He listened attentively. Finding him sympathetic and interested, she proceeded to relate her fears with regard to Djebl Anaba — fears augmented by the presence of Professor Scudamore at the Five Fountains, and of his so recent secret coming to Djebl Anaba.

"I want you to come over one evening, if you can, Father, and bless the house and, if possible, say Mass there on the following morning. I can prepare a room."

"I could come to-night after Benediction, if you like," said the priest. "I have a portable altar and permission to say Mass wherever I am. M. l'Abbé is here — he can take my place here to-morrow."

"I suppose you do not know of any tragedy that has taken place recently or even of late years at Djebl Anaba?" she asked, as she rose to take leave of him.

"There was the affair of Mahmoud's death. He was, as you know, Aziz's younger brother. There has been nothing else, as far as I know.

Mahmoud's death of course gave rise to a great deal of gossip and scandal."

"I have never heard any details of it," said Pamela slowly.

"Mr. Mellish did not tell you?" said the priest in surprise. "He was, however, of — of great assistance to Aziz at the time, in his endeavor to trace the culprit."

Pamela turned very pale.

"I only knew that he had a younger brother who died under sad and mysterious circumstances," she said. "Professor Scudamore told Lady Saltmarshe, who is a friend of mine. My husband has never spoken of the affair to me."

"It is no secret, Madame. And it might be well for you to know all the facts. This man Mahmoud was engaged to be married to a young Arab girl whose home was not far from the Five Fountains. He was very jealous of her. Whether she gave him cause to be I do not know. It was said that he had accused her of loving another man, and that she had denied the accusation. She was found about a week before the date fixed for the wedding in the subterranean lake in the forest. There were signs of a struggle having taken place near the water's edge. Mahmoud could not at first be found, but his body was discovered later in the forest, shot through the heart. It was believed he killed the girl and then committed suicide. But Aziz persisted in the belief that he had been murdered by the unknown lover of the girl in revenge for her death. It is true that a strange scarab ring was found on the banks of the lake — a curious one of antique workmanship. Aziz is still trying to discover the owner. He is a very proud man — proud of his wealth, his family, his position, and he was

extremely attached to Mahmoud, who was a very worthless man. Aziz has vowed vengeance upon this unknown man who, he believes, brought this stigma of crime and dishonor into the family."

Pamela's face was white as death. She seemed to be sitting near Aziz at that dinner-party at the Five Fountains; she could hear him say: *"If I knew the owner of this ring I should know all I wish to."* And far back she could hear Professor Scudamore uttering those strange words at East Feddon: *"A very violent control — one would almost think that he had wished to enter into communication with us for purposes of revenge."*

Why had Ralph so persistently denied all knowledge of these events which must be still so fresh in his mind? Why had he never told her of this story of love and jealousy and crime? Why had he kept these things a secret from her? Why had he forbidden her long ago to mention her fears to Lady Saltmarshe? Above all, why did he admit Professor Scudamore secretly into the house at night?

She turned her thoughts from the obvious answer as disloyal and cruel and unjust to Ralph. He had seen how nervous she was, and he had not wished to increase her nervousness of the place by telling her of this tragedy. Perhaps, too, his friendship for Aziz had made him take the affair too greatly to heart.

His friendship? When she thought of the two men, she recalled her own firm conviction that Aziz was the ruling power of the two; he dominated Ralph.

Ralph feared Aziz. Feared him so much that, against his own will and judgment, he permitted him to bring the Professor to the house.

For what purpose did he come? Was it that he

might try once more to evoke that fierce and violent control that had attacked her at East Feddon? Had he determined by this means to wring some confession from Ralph? Was Ralph indeed the owner of the scarab ring? Had he known and perhaps loved that dead girl whose body had been found in the black waters of the subterranean lake at the Five Fountains?

And Ralph's own words seemed to confirm her suspicions. Had he not told her that there were things which might part them, destroying her love? Had he not said that he could never be a Catholic — that something stood in the way? What part had he played in that sordid little tragedy?

When at last she spoke she said in a cold, controlled voice:

"My husband knew I was very nervous of the natives when I first came to Djebl Anaba. Perhaps he thought such a story might increase my nervousness. I think I shall not tell him that you have mentioned it to me, Father. He isn't very well, and I don't want to worry him. Still, it was very kind of you to tell me."

"Your husband has no thought of becoming a Catholic?"

"I am afraid he has none at present. But don't be afraid to talk to him about it. He is very sympathetic, and not at all prejudiced. Indeed, I am sure he admires and loves the Church. He did not put any obstacle in my way."

She found it less easy to broach the subject of Professor Scudamore.

"I had not heard of his being there," said the priest; "perhaps M. le Curé at the Five Fountains does not know of it, or I think he would have told me. Professor Scudamore is well known in France. I expect Aziz sent for him to try to elucidate the

mystery by some magic, spiritistic means. The Arabs are, as you are probable aware, deeply learned in magic practices. Their belief in djinns and spirits of all kinds is as profound as it was in the days of the Arabian Nights."

Looking rather steadily at Pamela, he said:

"You are not looking very well, Mrs. Mellish. And if your husband is not well, would it not be possible for you both to go to England for a few months? Our African sun is very fierce to Northerners. For myself, I was born and bred under it."

She shook her head.

"He is very obstinate on that point. While I was away myself he was very ill, but he does not like to talk about it. I am going to ask you to come — whenever you can — and help me to fight those evil influences which are surrounding him at Djebl Anaba."

"The influences," he said quietly, "of Aziz and Professor Scudamore?"

"Yes," she said, "I have the feeling that they can't touch me now or hurt me. But they can hurt Ralph. I must fight for him, you see, M. le Curé."

She stood up brave, strong, and splendid; her dark eyes shining with a soft, wonderful light.

"You must help me to conquer them," she said.

CHAPTER XXXI

RALPH and Pamela remained at St. Augustin until the evening, lunching and spending the greater part of the day in a hotel near the harbor. After Benediction they called for Father Muret and started off in the car upon their homeward journey.

Pamela sat in front beside her husband, while the priest was alone inside the car.

When they had gone a few miles upon their homeward way a large and very swift closed car passed them on the road. Two men were sitting in it. Pamela caught a glimpse of a turbaned head.

"Whose car is that?" she said.

"Probably it belongs to Aziz."

"Was he in St. Augustin to-day?"

"Yes," said Ralph in a constrained tone.

"With Professor Scudamore?"

"Yes," he said again.

"You saw them? You spoke to them?"

"Yes. While you were talking to Father Muret——"

"Do you think they are — watching us?"

"Watching us? Why should they watch us?"

She wanted to say, "To see that you do not leave the country," but she did not dare.

She only remarked almost carelessly:

"What a long time Professor Scudamore is staying at the Five Fountains!"

To this Ralph made no reply. She turned her head a little and glanced at the priest who sat there, a silent black figure saying his office, his eyes attentively fixed upon his book. She wondered if Professor Scudamore had noticed him. Would he divine her motive in bringing him to Djebl Anaba? Would he object to the presence of one who fought bravely in the opposite camp?

"Ralph, have you heard of a new chauffeur?" she asked presently, when they had gone some little distance in silence.

"No; it is hardly worth while. We really don't need one. Kassim can clean the car and do the necessary repairs."

"But he can't drive it," she said helplessly.

"I shall drive it myself. Only I protest against too many expeditions in the hot sun!" He turned and smiled at her, and then drove on a little more rapidly, as if he did not wish to discuss the subject with her any further.

"Father Muret will say Mass to-morrow morning," she said at last. "Which room do you think I had better prepare for it?"

"Your own sitting-room, I should think."

"Not the library?"

"No — certainly not the library. I am often at work there very late. The preparations would disturb me."

"Very well, Ralph," she said.

She felt perfectly certain from his emphatic manner that he was expecting Professor Scudamore to pay him another secret and nocturnal visit. She trembled to think of it. What legions of evil would be set loose? What fierce and violent and revengeful spirits would be pitilessly evoked?

She seemed more than ever vividly aware of the dangers that surrounded Ralph — and she felt that at any moment an attack might be made upon him such as had been made upon her at East Feddon. Yet he would not go away. Was it because he knew that any effort he might make to do so would be immediately frustrated? Aziz was watching him like a bird of prey. Aziz was waiting for the clue which would deliver his victim into his hands. The clue to the owner of the scarab ring.

She tried to free herself from these thoughts. They were disloyal to Ralph. And, besides, this was the twentieth century and such necromantic practices seemed unreal, forming part of an ancient superstition. But the remembrance of East Feddon gave the lie to all her saner conclusions. Even

Ralph himself had admitted that Billy had gone into the burning house to save her.

"Our name is Legion, for we are many."

The words came back to her mind with a strange persistence. Timidly she glanced at her husband. Only his profile was visible to her; hard, harsh, set as if cast in an iron mold. The lips were tightly closed; the great dark eyes behind the yellow goggles stared straight in front of him at the white road that curved and dipped and climbed and dipped again like a wayward, capricious thing up and down the mountains.

The sun was setting when they reached the lake of Aïn Rira — a wide sheet of turquoise faintly touched with gold, melting away into the dim and darkening blue of the mountains. It seemed to Pamela that she was in a world of blue, where the sky burned like a fierce sapphire whose hues were reflected in the wide lake. Even the flowers were blue — the strange dim thistles, the brightness of the borage that seemed almost to match the sky in its unbroken sheet of sapphire. Only the grazing cattle made blots of white and brown in the low meadows. Far in the distance there was a vivid white patch that looked almost like snow. As the car approached the mass took to itself myriads of flashing silver wings as a whole flight of grebes rose into the air, separating, then coming together again, circling round in swift apprehensive flight.

The sun sank behind the mountains, and for a short time the skies were painted with flaming gold that darkened suddenly into the shadows of night. It was almost dark when they came in sight of the white tower of Djebl Anaba thrust above the black grove of palms. The place looked so beautiful, as if it had been carven in ivory — a palace fit for a king and queen to inhabit. A little kingdom where

no shadow of evil should ever have been permitted to enter . . . Pamela longed to set it free . . . as from an ancient curse.

She loved Ralph. Her love should set him free.

Her eyes were shining as he helped her to descend from the car.

"Not too tired?" he said tenderly.

"I'm not at all tired, thank you, Ralph."

"You have had a long day."

"But I have enjoyed it so much."

She led the way into the house, while Ralph and Father Muret followed.

After dinner that night Pamela prepared the room, arranging the altar and setting the vestments in readiness. Father Muret helped her with the task. He asked her if she would answer at Mass on the following day, and as she had never done this before he gave her some instructions in the matter. She had learned Latin and read it easily and he found her an apt pupil.

Ralph left them together and went to the library. Switching on the light, he saw a figure that for an instant startled him violently. The next moment he recognized Aziz, who was sitting there with the strange, dumb patience of the Oriental, evidently waiting for him. Ralph felt the blood surge to his temples and then swing its way back to his heart.

"You — Aziz?" he said.

There was a note of irritability in his soft voice, as if he were annoyed at this unexpected, almost impertinent intrusion.

"Yes. I took the liberty of walking in and waiting for you. So you have a guest here?"

"M. le Curé from St. Augustin is spending the night here," said Ralph coldly.

"So I imagined. It would therefore, be useless waste of time for Professor Scudamore to conduct any of his experiments to-night. I came, therefore, to make his excuses."

"My wife has become a Catholic, as perhaps you have heard," said Ralph; "she wished to have Mass said here to-morrow. I saw no objection, and we brought M. le Curé back with us."

"I understand that you wish our experiments to be successful?" said Aziz in rather an angry tone.

"On the contrary — I object to the whole thing very strongly. I promised you my help in every legitimate way. But I dislike having this man Scudamore in my house!"

His face was a shade paler; the tense, iron look was emphasized.

"You must understand," continued Aziz, "that the presence of your priest militates against the chance of success. We have taken upwards of fifty plates. Not one has anything at all recognizable."

"I am not concerned about the plates," said Ralph defiantly, "and I am certainly not going to refuse my wife any pleasure and happiness which her religion may offer her."

Both faces were grim and implacable. It was as if the one were saying, *You shall tell me*, and the other, *You shall never know.*

"There is no prospect, then, of Madame's returning to England?"

"None at all."

"You can not persuade her?"

"I can not. I have done all I could in the matter. As you know, I almost forbade her to return here. Nevertheless she came."

"You told me that she disliked Djebl Anaba."

"So she did at first. But now she has changed her mind. She does not wish to leave it."

"Did she ever tell you exactly what happened to her at East Feddon?" said Aziz.

There was something definitely menacing in the Arab's tone. He had never before mentioned East Feddon by name to Ralph. What had the Professor been telling him of that night of horror?"

"Yes — she told me about it. An absurd affair."

"You persist, then, in believing that the Professor is only a charlatan?"

"Yes. And I may as well tell you, Aziz, that on this point you betray all the childishness of your race, with its silly beliefs in djinns and afreets and all the hobgoblins the uneducated Arab has such faith in. Why don't you rise superior to it all? You are an educated, cultivated man. I shall hear of your making a pilgrimage to some marabout soon!"

He spoke with severity, almost with bitterness. The Arab flinched a little under the scornful rebuke. He was excessively vain, and he liked to believe himself perfectly Europeanized. And he had enormous faith in Ralph's opinion.

"You ought to know better than to allow yourself to be duped in this way, or to attach any importance to this fool game!"

"And Madame — your wife? Was she duped too?" said Aziz stubbornly.

Ralph was silent.

"And the young Englishman — her cousin — who had marks on his throat?" pursued Aziz inexorably.

"Professor Scudamore is making very great demands upon your credulity," said Ralph, "and upon your pocket, too, I expect, if all were known!"

"What about Mrs. Blair, then?" said Aziz.

His face wore an obstinate, determined look.

"Perhaps you are not aware that Mrs. Blair is dead?" continued the Arab sullenly.

"I was not aware of it."

"She threw herself into the lake at East Feddon," said Aziz; "she was in constant communication with her dead husband. He urged her to escape and return home."

He was secretly enraged at Ralph's arrogant and insulting tone, and the lash of his contempt had stung him keenly.

"We are disappointed — the Professor and I — at the very half-hearted way in which you have helped us. You have done almost nothing. You have seemed reluctant even to give us any assistance!"

"Because I won't have anything to do with these fool tricks!" said Ralph angrily. "You'd better get rid of that man as soon as you can, Aziz. He is preying on your weakest side — your love of superstitious and magical practices!"

"He will uncover the truth for me," said Aziz; "when he has done that he will go."

He stood up — a proud, majestic figure.

"Good night — I must be going home."

Ralph watched him as he went out of the window into the balcony and disappeared down the stairs. A silent, ghostly figure, set implacably upon revenge.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE priest had gone away. Ralph had taken him back to St. Augustin, and had returned rather late for the midday breakfast. During that meal he was very silent, and Pamela observed that he looked tired and seemed preoccupied. Afterward he complained of headache. His eyes were

heavy and there were deep little stains rimming them. When Pamela touched his head she found that it was burning hot. She feared that he was going to have another attack of fever and begged him to go and lie down.

He submitted with a strange docility, only saying as he left the room:

"Don't come and see me, Pamela. I think I shall get some sleep."

Pamela went into her own sitting-room and lay on the big divan. She thought she would try and follow Ralph's example and go to sleep. She felt very tired, and the excessive heat had exhausted he. She put on a soft white muslin wrapper, and lay back drowsily upon the soft cushions.

At first she tried to read, then the book dropped from her hand and with a little crash fell upon the floor. She was too sleepy to pick it up.

She must have been asleep for rather more than an hour when she awoke suddenly, as if some abrupt noise had aroused her. A feeling of idleness, of inertia, still possessed her, and she felt disinclined to move. It was so restful lying there in the darkened room.

Then across the silence, she became aware of a sustained murmur of voices, or, rather, of a single voice that rose and fell across the stillness, like a troubled, continuous accompaniment of sound. She did not know quite at what point it began to give her an eerie sensation as of something not wholly normal.

Then she remembered Ralph's headache, his look of illness and pain at breakfast, the dark shadows under his eyes.

Perhaps he was sickening for another attack of that mysterious and violent malady, which had seized him during her absence in England.

Slipping hastily from the couch, she ran down the landing and paused outside his door. She stood there listening, trembling. . . . Yes — it was from thence the sound came; it was Ralph's voice, and he was talking, talking in loud and violent tones, now firmly and protestingly, now hurriedly and incoherently, seldom pausing. He was speaking like a man in delirium.

Summoning all her courage she opened the door and stood for a moment irresolutely upon the threshold.

The room was almost perfectly dark, for all the persiennes were closed across the windows. It was a very large room, with scarcely any furniture in it. Ralph's small iron bed stood in one corner. A little table stood near it and there was another and a larger one in the middle of the room. There were one or two chairs, and that was all. He used the adjoining apartment as a dressing-room. There was no carpet, and her footsteps, as she approached him softly, made a faint sound on the red-tiled floor.

Ralph was not lying on the bed. As her eyes became more accustomed to the darkness of the room she saw that he was sitting in an arm-chair quite close to the window. He had taken off his coat and collar and his shirt was unfastened at the throat.

He took no notice of her, but his voice continued to utter that strange, sustained monologue.

"Ralph . . ." she said.

Still he took no notice of her, but went on speaking. She could not understand a single word of all that he said. Presently she became aware that he was not speaking English, but Arabic. The sound of the language was sufficiently familiar to her for her to be able to recognize it, although she had only picked up a few words.

He seemed to be remonstrating as if with some

unseen person. His voice was stern and authoritative. At times he was dictatorial, at times threatening, at times almost entreating. The mysterious, unceasing monologue went on without pause. He did not appear to notice Pamela's presence even when she crossed the room and stood quite close to him.

At last she crept away. She was afraid now that he might see her and endeavor to detain her. And it was necessary to find Robinson and tell him to fetch a doctor. She was certain that Ralph was very ill.

She closed the door after her as she went out. Then she ran hastily to her room and rang the bell sharply. In a few minutes Robinson appeared.

He too had evidently been enjoying a siesta, for his eyes were still half-closed with sleep and he seemed not yet fully aroused.

"Robinson," she said, "Mr. Mellish is very ill — he is delirious. I think he must have had a touch of the sun. We must send for the doctor. Will you go and fetch him? You know where he lives, don't you?"

"Yes; but if he is ill as he was before, ma'am, I had better not leave him. I can tell Salah to go — he can ride in and fetch him."

Pamela felt suddenly very helpless and alone. She wished then she could have had André and the car at her disposal.

"If you will excuse me, ma'am, I will send Salah at once, and then go to Mr. Mellish. He ought not to be left."

He was fully awake now, and his alert little cockney face was not without a reassuring suggestion of competence.

"Very well, Robinson. Send Salah and come back as quickly as you can."

She went back to the door of Ralph's room and waited in the passage till Robinson returned.

He was not gone very long, and when he came back she stood aside and waited while he went into the room.

She heard him saying:

"Can I help you into bed, sir? You have got another touch of fever. . . ."

The man spoke in a very clear, rather loud voice. It seemed to rouse Ralph, for that horrible monologue ceased suddenly, and a voice that was weak as a child's answered:

"Yes. I think you had better. I am feeling a bit knocked up."

Pamela leaned against the wall. The door was still ajar and she could hear every movement within the room. There had been something terrible about that vision of Ralph sitting there in the armchair and uttering that monologue in a strange, guttural language. It had reminded her of that night at East Feddon, when Marcelle, the medium, had sat there speaking words that had been to her incomprehensible, unintelligible, and yet had given her the impression of possessing some horrible and sinister meaning.

It seemed to her that every nerve in her body was alert and strained to catch the first sound of that renewed monologue. She dreaded every moment lest the silence should be broken. She remembered all that Robinson had told her about Ralph's former illness, especially how he had sat up all night with the doctor because his master could not be left. She remembered, too, how he had told her that Ralph had been very violent. . . . She began to pray that the doctor might come soon.

But even if Salah started at once it would be impossible for him to arrive in less than two hours.

The distance was too great, and both would have to ride. Why had not Ralph replaced André at once, knowing that he was himself subject to these violent and sudden attacks of fever?

As she stood there, Robinson suddenly appeared in the doorway and without a word ran down the passage. He looked upset and alarmed, and his face was pale. The emotionless mask of the carefully trained manservant had vanished.

"I've told Kassim to come, ma'am," he said, when he returned a few minutes later. "If he gets bad like last time I shall want help. Only one can't depend on these Arabs," he added.

Robinson was neither a tall nor a strong man, he was light and active rather than robust.

"What did you do last time?" Pamela asked.

"André helped me until the doctor came. But he wasn't much use. He seemed — afraid-like."

"Do you think that was the reason why André wished to go?" she asked.

"Couldn't say, ma'am. He didn't give me any reason except that he didn't care if he was sent away or not."

She remembered that Ralph had told her that the man had been very rude and insulting when he had given him notice to leave, and that was why he had summarily dismissed him. What had he said? . . .

Suddenly a sound that was like a half-suppressed snarl broke across the silence. Robinson dashed into the room.

"It — it is all right, sir," Pamela heard him say in a reassuring, soothing voice, exactly as if he were speaking to a frightened child.

"Oh, are you there, Robinson?"

Pamela crept into the room. She could see

Ralph sitting up in bed, his eyes large and fierce and burning like flames.

"Try and lie down, sir. The doctor will be here soon."

Then the voice began again, and again it filled Pamela with a sense of slowly growing horror. It seemed to her as if she had been there for years, listening to that voice that was not in the least like Ralph's, uttering its fierce, unintelligible monologue.

The day wore on. Robinson had pushed back the persiennes and admitted the cool wind that at sunset had set in from the sea. The sky was filled with a wonderful light as of liquid gold, against which the grove of palms stood heavily back. The mountains were painted in fading pansy-like hues. All the wide plain that lay between Djebl Anaba and the Five Fountains lay as if asleep in the golden evening light. And still the voice, growing weaker, continued its weary recitative.

All Pamela's fears of the place leaped into more passionate and active life. She saw from the very beginning that things had never seemed perfectly normal at Djebl Anaba. There had always been in the background some obscure and mysterious, but nevertheless terrifying thing that had subtly poisoned the place for her. And it was something, too, that strained its horrible tentacles, octopus-like, into the past, and touched hands with the abiding horror of that never-forgotten night at East Feddon.

And into the web of that nebulous horror she and Ralph had been ruthlessly drawn.

Presently Kassim came upstairs and crept softly into the room. He and Robinson sat one on each

side of the bed in alert and vigilant attitudes, as if they were waiting for something to happen.

Outside the landscape darkened. Stars lit their golden lamps in the sky. There was a young moon, a mere thread of silver, sickle-shaped. The mountains lay like gigantic, slumbering beasts. The Rocher de Lion, that hung in the distance over the port of St. Augustin, showed its vast, leonine profile like a waiting beast of prey. Now the plain was swallowed up in darkness. A glimmering row of lights outlined the little village street of the Five Fountains. Far off the melodious fluting of some boy-musician trickled like a thin stream of liquid sound across the silence. And at last came the welcome sound of horses' hoofs galloping at full speed in the direction of Djebl Anaba. The doctor had come at last, after — as it seemed to Pamela — an interminable delay.

So far all had gone well. But the doctor had hardly reached the top of the stairs when Ralph leaped suddenly from the bed. It seemed as if he had purposely profited by the momentarily relaxed vigilance of the two men. When they tried to seize him he fought them back with a horrible, sickening violence. Pamela thought he would have killed Kassim, but the Arab dodged the blows with extraordinary cunning. Robinson's mean little cockney face was imbued with a strange courage. He had the quality of absolute fidelity, and he had been with Ralph for many years. He had been in trouble, and Ralph had given him a chance of rehabilitating his character. Now he was fighting for his master with a strength that seemed almost superhuman. As the door opened to admit the doctor, Ralph suddenly caught sight of Pamela, and he made a rush at her. He caught her in his arms and crushed her against the wall. She had never

felt anything like the mighty strength of those arms. It was a strength that did not seem to her quite human. She believed that he intended to kill her. He would crush the life out of her. He seemed possessed with some strange madness. . . . He was making that kind of determined attack upon her that Something had done once, long ago, at East Feddon.

"Ralph — it is I — Pamela! Please let me go — you are hurting me!"

Her voice rang out clear and steady, though she had scarcely breath to speak. But it sufficed. He released her suddenly, gazed at her in a dazed, bewildered kind of way, and then dropped his arms limply at his sides.

"My dear Pamela — I must have been dreaming . . . I didn't know . . . I think I am ill . . . don't come ——"

He stumbled and fell heavily to the ground. When they lifted him up, he suffered them to take him back to bed, submitting like a little child.

Pamela stole back to her own room. She began to feel that she could not bear any more. She could not think or pray. It was like some terrible nightmare.

"You did the only thing," said the doctor to her later, when Ralph was quietly asleep. "You spoke to him so clearly it brought him to his senses. If you had screamed or struggled ——"

"What does it mean?" she asked, with trembling lips.

She was very white and she had been crying.

"Is my husband a maniac?" she asked.

She was determined to know the truth.

"Far from it, Madame. And he told me once that he had never suffered from any form of fit or

epileptic seizures — not even from *le petit mal.* This is a temporary thing, induced by some external force which I am not at present able to determine. I have only once seen a case that in any way resembled it. A colleague of mine, who is now a very eminent specialist for all kinds of nervous and cerebral maladies, differed from the other physicians who were called in to pronounce upon it. So obstinate were they in their opinion that he threw up his post — a very high and lucrative one at a French hospital."

"How did he differ from them?" she asked.

"Madame, if I may speak quite plainly to you, my colleague was the only one of those physicians who was a practicing and believing Catholic. And he affirmed that it was a case of possession, such as we read of in the New Testament. It was discovered later that for years the man had been taking part in spiritualistic séances and in automatic writing."

Pamela was white to the lips. She did not speak.

"In an age, Madame, which has ceased to believe in God, one can look for even less belief in a devil seeking to devour. But to those who believe that there is not only a heaven, but a hell where Satan and those wicked spirits dwell who were once exiled from heaven, it is not difficult also to believe that these spirits are capable of entering into a man — destroying spirits that wreak their vengeance alike upon body and soul."

She gave an involuntary shudder, clasping her hands tightly together and regarding him with wide, bright eyes.

At last she said:

"I believe that you are right. I believe that it is a case of, at any rate, partial possession." She waited a moment and then continued. "Will you

listen while I tell you something that may throw a light upon his malady?"

She related briefly the history beginning at East Feddon before her marriage; the violent and determined attack that had been made upon herself; the terror that had come upon her at first sight of Aziz, who so strangely resembled the fugitive face, beneath the white turban, of the apparition. She mentioned, too, the secret nocturnal visits of Aziz and Professor Scudamore.

"And, now, what am I to do to free him?"

"Madame — there are those who say that a doctor is useless — that only a priest can cure these subtle maladies of the soul. If he were a Catholic, one could only urge him to go to confession, to receive absolution, even to be exorcized by a priest. Madame, these things are, I know, madness in the eyes of an unbelieving generation. Small wonder that the devils cry: *'What have I to do with Thee, Jesus of Nazareth?'* Yet it is only in His Name that the devils can be cast out. You must urge this course upon your husband."

CHAPTER XXXIII

ALL night the struggle continued, and the doctor was compelled to forbid Pamela to enter her husband's room. Such sights and sounds were not for a young and sensitive woman, and he feared that they could only make a cruelly permanent impression upon one who had already endured so much.

Pamela sat in her own room, not daring to go to bed nor to try to sleep. She strained her ears to try and catch those confused and fugitive sounds which emanated from that closely guarded room. Cries

of an animal rather than of a man; fierce struggles to be free; wild, mutinous and savage moanings.

She took up her Bible at last and read:

And they came over the strait of the sea into the country of the Gerasens.

And as He went out of the ship, immediately there met Him out of the monuments a man with an unclean spirit,

Who had his dwelling in the tombs, and no man now could bind him, not even with chains.

For having been often bound with fetters and chains, he had burst the chains, and broken the fetters in pieces, and no one could tame him.

And he was always night and day in the monuments and in the mountains, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

And seeing Jesus, afar off, he ran and adored Him.

And crying with a loud voice, he said: What have I to do with thee, Jesus, the Son of the most high God? I adjure Thee by God that Thou torment me not.

For He said unto him: Go out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

And He asked him: What is thy name? And he saith to Him: My name is Legion, for we are many.

And he besought Him much, that He would not drive him away out of the country.

And there was near the mountain a great herd of swine, feeding.

And the spirits besought Him saying: Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

And Jesus immediately gave them leave. And the unclean spirits going out, entered into the swine: and the herd with great violence was carried

headlong into the sea, being about two thousand, and was stifled in the sea.

She turned the leaves mechanically and came to another place.

And . . . Jesus threatened the unclean spirit, saying to him: Deaf and dumb spirit, I command thee go out of him: and enter not any more into him.

And crying out, and greatly tearing him, he went out of him, and he became as dead, so that many said: He is dead.

Outside, the dawn was breaking in the east, golden and gray behind the mountains, whose summits were faintly gilded. There was a cool, strong, invigorating breeze, freshening the air. The birds were singing.

Within the house — even within that guarded room — all was silent.

Pamela pushed back the casements and gazed out of the window. Across the plain from the Five Fountains something was moving in a cloud of silvery dust. As it drew nearer she could see the gleaming outlines of a large motor coming toward the gates very swiftly. Some one was coming in great haste to Djebl Anaba. She wondered who it could be at this early hour. It was not yet five o'clock. She waited with a kind of dull curiosity. It seemed so impossible that any one could come to her assistance — here in this remote spot.

She watched. The high iron gates were flung open and the car slid with ever-increased rapidity toward the house. It seemed to her as if its very speed signified an almost fierce purpose on the part of the occupants of the car, as if they felt that there was no time to be lost. It seemed to assure her

that help was coming to her in her misery, her anxiety, her solitude. Help, too, that would somehow frustrate all the future plans and machinations of Aziz and Professor Scudamore.

The car stopped. As far as she could tell, it was one that was quite unknown to her. It was more the shape of a racing car, with a long, low body, and it was painted dust-colored. No one in the neighborhood possessed one that at all resembled it. Two men now descended from it. One was a short figure in a black soutane; the other a tall young man who suddenly raised his face toward the window. His thick, reddish hair was blown back from his brow by the wind.

It was Billy Mowbray, and with him was Father Benedict.

Pamela ran quickly down the stairs and into the courtyard to meet them. No one in the house was stirring. She had to push back the bolts and turn the great key of the front door to gain access to the courtyard. But already that one glimpse of those two friendly faces had lifted an immense load from her heart.

"Thank God you have come, Father," she said.

The color had come back to her cheeks, the light to her eyes.

"Are we in time?" said Father Benedict.

His face, in spite of its detached and ascetic look, bore traces of keen anxiety.

"Yes. But Ralph is very ill. The doctor has been with him all night."

"Is he conscious?"

"I am not sure. He has been very violent and delirious, and I have not been allowed to go into the room since yesterday."

She led the way upstairs. She had not spoken to Billy, nor he to her. But it was a comfort to

know that he was there, and his strong, friendly presence seemed to destroy her fears.

"How did you know?" she asked, turning to Father Benedict when they reached the landing.

"Lady Saltmarshe told me of your letter. She had delayed her departure for Rome and I saw her in town. She seemed very anxious. She said that your maid had left you — that you were also without a chauffeur, that your husband had been very ill during your absence, and that you seemed very much alone. But what decided me to come was the fact which she also communicated to me — namely, that Professor Scudamore was still in the neighborhood and was paying secret visits to your house at night. I knew that foreboded no good either to yourself or to your husband. I resolved to come at once, if I could obtain leave. Mr. Mowbray volunteered to accompany me. We thought it unsafe for you to be alone. We slept last night at St. Augustin, and the priest told us of your husband's illness. He had only heard of it yesterday and knew no particulars. We started as early as we could."

Pamela paused outside Ralph's room, and listened at the door. All was silent within.

"I think Ralph must be still asleep," she said.

"Does the doctor say what is the matter with him?" inquired Father Benedict.

"He only says that it resembles — a case of possession."

"Let me go to him," said the priest.

She turned to him piteously.

"I don't know if it is safe. Sometimes he is very violent — he does not recognize people. And seeing a strange face he might attack you."

She looked dubiously at Father Benedict's slight and frail figure.

"I am not afraid," said the priest. "I have had experience of these cases."

"I shall be at hand if you want help, Father," said Billy Mowbray.

It was the first time he had spoken. He had kept his eyes resolutely turned away from Pamela during the whole of the interview. That first glimpse of her had revealed something in her face that he felt he could not bear to look upon. Something of fear and anguish, almost of despair, that should never have been there.

Father Benedict opened the door and entered the room. The windows were wide open and the eastern sky was still pale and beautiful and rose-tinted with the dawn. The air that swept in was soft and fragrant and cool as if it had traveled over miles and miles of dew-laden grass.

From the bed there came a sudden fierce and choking cry, half snarl, half groan. And Something gigantic and powerful and violent ran and leaped across the room, hurling itself upon Father Benedict in an access of savagery. Ralph scarcely looked human; his eyes were wild, his hair dishevelled, the lips were drawn back from the clenched teeth. His powerful arms had seized the priest in their fierce and overwhelming grasp. Pamela saw Father Benedict raise his hand and make the sign of the cross. There was something firm and unflinching and quite unafraid about that spare, fragile figure. And yet it seemed impossible to those who watched that he could emerge unscathed from that violent and savage onslaught that was like the uncontrolled attack of a wild beast rather than that of a man.

Then Ralph's hands dropped as if powerless to his sides; he stood there staring in a dazed, con-

fused way from one to the other, from doctor to priest — as if he were slowly awakening from some horrible nightmare. He stumbled back to the bed and a sound like a sob escaped him. It was a little, low, desolate sound that tore Pamela's heart as she heard it.

She saw Father Benedict make a slight but authoritative gesture to the three men — the doctor, Robinson, and Kassim — who all rose and went out of the room. They left the door slightly open as they joined the little group in the passage without. Kassim went downstairs, but Robinson remained standing at a little distance from the rest.

In a few minutes the priest came toward the door and closed it. His lips moved slightly. Pamela knew that he was praying. His face was calm, collected, austere.

There was a long, long silence. Once voices could be heard, low and hushed. Those outside the door could not distinguish any words, but they could recognize Ralph's voice, feeble, weak, and hesitating, and Father Benedict's cold, firm, and deliberate tones.

A deep silence fell upon Djebl Anaba, it seemed to impregnate the old house with a curious peace. And when it was broken it was broken suddenly and abruptly by one loud, fierce, and violent cry that echoed from end to end of it. It was a sound that did not seem to any of those who heard it quite human. Pamela could only think of those words she had read last night:

"*And crying out, and greatly tearing him, he went out of him. . . .*"

Then there followed a renewal of that deep, tranquil, almost holy silence.

It seemed to Pamela as if ages and ages must have passed before the door opened and Father Ben-

edict reappeared. But during that time all her fear and suspense had vanished. A new serenity possessed her. She shared the peace that had newly come to that poor, tired, molested soul.

Father Benedict opened the door and came out of the room. He was a little paler than before, but his face was quite unmoved. He drew Pamela aside and said in a low voice:

"Go to him, Mrs. Mellish. He is at peace now. He has made his confession, and I have baptized him and given him absolution as he himself desired."

Pamela went alone into the room.

"Ralph . . . dear Ralph. . . ." she said pitifully.

He lay back on the pillows, looking very white and exhausted.

"I have been very ill," he said; "I hope I did not frighten you. I did not know what I was saying or doing. . . ."

"But you are going to get well now," she said, stroking his hand.

"Yes. They can't touch me now," he said.

He looked at her tenderly.

"Pamela," he said, "that ring was mine."

"I know," she said.

"How did you know?"

"I think I have always known. Some one told me the story. And I guessed then. East Feddon helped me to guess it."

"That poor girl was very unhappy," he said; "she came to me for help. She was afraid of Mahmoud — she said she would die rather than marry him. She hid in the cave that night when I had promised to help her to escape. But Mahmoud was watching; he attacked us, and after a struggle he pushed her into the lake. He shot at me, but I

escaped in the darkness, and he must have gone into the forest and committed suicide. Aziz has always suspected that I was the unknown man. I have sometimes thought he believes too that I murdered his brother."

"Don't think of it any more, Ralph." She stooped and kissed his forehead.

"It has made no difference to your love?" he said. "I was so afraid of losing you. . . ."

She said: "Nothing could make any difference. . . ." She held his hand, stroking it. "Try to go to sleep now, Ralph. You must be very tired."

He shut his eyes and seemed to fall into a deep and tranquil slumber.

CHAPTER XXXIV

PAMELA, weary with her long vigil, went out into the garden. She had left Ralph quietly sleeping. It had been arranged that both Father Benedict and Billy Mowbray should remain at Djebl Anaba for a few days until his recovery was perfectly assured. Nor was it safe for Pamela to stay there alone and unprotected under the circumstances. She had eagerly assented to their proposal to remain.

Dusk had fallen, and here and there a distant light pricked the plain. As she stood there, she saw the gates swing back, and two figures came on foot toward the house. Even at this distance she could recognize them for Aziz and Professor Scudamore.

She did not feel afraid of them any more. There was no secret between herself and Ralph. She was determined to refuse them admittance.

They could neither alarm nor hurt her now. She was strengthened with a new courage. She went toward them.

"Can we see Mr. Mellish?" said Aziz.

Under his white turban, his bronzed face was hard and fierce. He reminded her more than ever of an eagle of the desert with his keen eyes and hooked nose.

"My husband is ill," she answered fearlessly; "I am afraid you can not see him."

"I must see him," said Aziz. "I wish to tell him that I have discovered the owner of the ring!"

He set his lips obstinately.

Pamela looked from one to the other. The Professor's expression, usually so benign, was now one of extreme and definite malevolence. It seemed to her that his face had lost something of its confident look.

"The doctor has given orders that none is to be admitted," she said. "Even I have only been into his room for a few minutes. If you have any message ——"

Aziz took the ring from his finger and with an almost childish petulance flung it upon the ground at Pamela's feet.

"Give it back to him!" he said violently.

She faced him without flinching.

"You have tormented him sufficiently about your affairs," she said. "He can not possibly attend to them now. You do not perhaps realize that he has been very ill — dangerously ill." She looked now steadily at Professor Scudamore. "You can not come in," she went on, "it would be of no use. Mr. Mowbray has come, and he has brought Father Benedict with him."

"We shall come to-morrow," said Aziz, "and then I shall insist upon seeing him. Let me advise

you not to make any attempt to remove him. Any attempt would be immediately frustrated!"

"You need not be afraid. He is much too ill to move," said Pamela.

She watched them as they walked slowly away without another word. What vengeance would they take — these two who had endeavored to compass Ralph's destruction?

The evening hush had fallen upon Djebl Anaba. Dark purple shadows lay upon the mountains, and all the golden sunlight had faded from the plain. The long line of the forest lay darkly against a sky from which all the laughing blue color had vanished.

It was very still. There was no wind from the sea to-night, nothing to temper the burning heat that all day had reigned in Northern Africa. The hot and fierce breath of the sun seemed still to enfold the parched and silent plain. But peace had come to Djebl Anaba. The evil and malignant presences that had tortured her and terrified her had been driven forth. Ralph was free. . . . The enemies at the Five Fountains might indeed wreak their hostility upon his fever-wasted body; they could not hurt his immortal soul. He was beyond the reach of their power. He had made his submission, and had received the absolution which she had always prayed that he might come to solicit.

It had all been like a miracle — this sudden, unexpected coming of Father Benedict and Billy just at a moment when she was beginning to despair. As she stood there leaning on the low white wall of the terrace, she made acts of passionate gratitude.

She was very tired and went to bed early that night, having first satisfied herself that Ralph needed

nothing. Robinson was to sleep in the room adjoining his, so as to be at hand in case he was required. The doctor had been called away to a distant and rather serious case.

Pamela never knew quite what aroused her, but she awoke very suddenly with a start, and when she opened her eyes, still feeling very drowsy and confused, she received the immediate impression that the room was full of a curious thick haze. Outside it was still quite dark and there was no moon. She could not see any stars, although they had been shining with their usual brilliance when she went to bed; she wondered if they also had been obscured by the haze.

She slipped out of bed and ran to the window. And as she watched, she saw a great tongue of leaping scarlet flame shoot up, as it were, from the very heart of the forest and then fade into the surrounding darkness. But it was soon succeeded by another, and then in all directions she perceived that flames were leaping and dancing and shooting up long tongues into the sky. . . .

There was not a moment to be lost. She ran swiftly across to Ralph's room and flung open the door.

She switched on the electric light. Roused by the sound, Ralph woke and sat up in bed. Pamela was standing in front of him. Her thick dark hair hung in loose folds over her shoulders. In her white wrapper, with her little bare feet and hanging hair, she looked very young, almost like a child.

"Ralph," she said, "there is a fire in the forest. . . ." She was breathless and her voice trembled with excitement.

"A fire, Pamela?" he said sleepily.

She drew back the curtain and flung open the

persiennes. Against the sky there was a long patch of shifting lurid light, rising and falling.

"Don't you see, Ralph? It can not be far away. . . ."

But Ralph, now fully awake and alarmed, had sprung from the bed and was standing by her side, leaning his hand on her shoulder.

"Oh, my dear Pamela, of course it is a fire," he said, "and the wind is blowing it this way. We must rouse every one. Save what you can of anything you value, though I am afraid there will not be time to do much. Perhaps Mowbray will see to the car and get it ready. I'm afraid we shall not save the house. Dress yourself as quickly as you can."

He was so weak that even this little effort had been too much for him; he sank back into a chair with a groan.

"Tell Robinson to come to me, and please wake the others, Pamela, but don't stay too long in the house!"

A gust of wind blew a thick whiff of smoke into the room. It almost choked them.

Pamela roused Robinson, who came at once to his master's assistance, and then she ran hurriedly to the guest chambers where Father Benedict and Billy were sleeping. Both rose immediately, and Pamela, having given the alarm in the servants' quarters, went back to her own room. The appliances in case of fire at Djebl Anaba were surely insufficient to stem anything so immense as the conflagration that was so steadily approaching. The long drought, too, had greatly diminished the water-supply. There was a little clearing which had been made recently not far from the garden wall, but the wind blew the flames and sparks relentlessly across it, and the palm-fronds, dry as tinder, had

now caught fire and were blazing fiercely at the end of the terrace.

It could not be long before the flames should reach the house.

Pamela ran to the telephone. As it was only about three in the morning, it was some time before she got any answer either from the post-office at the Five Fountains or from St. Augustin. The Kabyle guards had now been aroused, and had awakened the Arabs on the estate, and all were making valiant attempts to stem the oncoming flames. They had brought out the long hose and were playing upon the grove of palms that stood in such perilous proximity to the house.

Billy had taken the two cars out of the garage and was thrusting into one of them some of Pamela's possessions which she had flung to him from the window.

Nothing could be more extraordinary than the swiftness with which the fire seemed to leap from tree to tree. The roar of the flames was now distinctly audible, while the crackling of the dried palm-fronds sounded like a succession of pistol shots. The long drought had baked everything to a degree of dryness that made each tree a ready victim to the great holocaust.

The date-palms stood now like slender, red-hot columns, their foliage burnt to ashes. One, the tallest and most splendid of all, suddenly toppled over and fell to the ground, its stem burnt almost through. It lay there, a slim, glowing scarlet pillar.

Now the solid wall of approaching flame, fierce and red-hot as some gigantic furnace, was close upon them. It was easy to see that the house was doomed.

Startled at finding the fire was now so close to the

house, Pamela left her room and ran downstairs. She paused beside the window on the staircase and, moved by a sudden impulse, went out onto the balcony. From this point she could see the other side of the house. To her horror, she perceived that it was threatened also on that side. There must have been two separate and distinct fires, so that the house was now menaced on each side.

As she turned her head, she saw Ralph coming slowly down the stairs; he was so weak that he could scarcely walk. He was very pale and looked extraordinarily emaciated.

"Oh, Ralph," she said, "I thought you had gone down long ago with Robinson. There is not any time to lose. See, the fire is on that side, too!" she took his arm and helped him down the stairs. Their progress was very slow. He stumbled, and once or twice she thought he would have fallen. She was thankful when they reached the garden in safety.

"Ralph, the car is over there — down the drive. Do you think you can walk so far? You will be quite safe there. It is an open space. You could sit in it until we are all ready to go."

A strange energy seized her which was in curious contrast to Ralph's silent and inert lassitude. He was so weakened by illness that he seemed to have lost all initiative. Even the destruction of his beloved and beautiful home did not seem to have any power to arouse him from this lethargy. He went very slowly along the path, watching the progress of the flames.

The fire lit up the scene with a strange and lurid glare. He could see Billy energetically directing the Arabs in their endeavors to stem the tide of destruction. His slight, youthful figure seemed to be everywhere at once. As he watched the thought

came into his mind that this fire was the work of Aziz. It was thus he had determined to avenge himself. He had intended perhaps, to destroy Djebl Anaba and all it contained at dead of night. But for Pamela, indeed, they might all have been burnt in their beds.

He saw Pamela pass into the courtyard as if she were once more going into the house. Perhaps she had forgotten something that she valued. It was not very safe for her to go now.

He rose from the seat, and walked back as quickly as he could toward the house. No one else had seen her go. Billy had transferred his activities to the other side of the building. The hoarse cries of the Arabs, the shouts and words of command combined with the roaring and crackling of the flames and the thick gusts of smoke that blew in his face and made his eyes smart, served to confuse and bewilder Ralph. But he had a single objective, and he plodded blindly on. Pamela was inside the house and he must go and fetch her. . . . He must go into the burning house.

The doorway was so filled with smoke that he could not see the stairs. As he lifted his head for a moment, he saw that the north walls had now burst into flame. Flames that danced and mocked like wanton, careless things, as if they revelled in the havoc they were causing. Flames that moved lightly and capriciously in the wind that stirred them. Such fragile things to wreak so much destruction. Crimson, buoyant flames that danced and leapt from wall to wall, from tree to tree.

He called her, "*Pamela! Pamela!*" The dull roaring of the flames drowned his weak voice.

He began to climb the darkened staircase. He could hear the thud of falling timber and masonry. It could not be long before the fire reached this

part of the house also, before it reached Pamela's room. . . . He struggled on.

When he pushed open the door at the top of the stairs a burst of flame sent its burning breath into his face. Sparks fell on his hand and face; he could feel the sharp, stinging pain of them where they touched him. He called again, "Pamela," and there was no answer. Was she still up there — in her room?

The flames beat him backward, and now he thought his only chance of saving her would be to hurry back to the garden and try to rescue her by means of a ladder. He went as quickly as he could, but his weakened limbs refused to hasten. All was light now, for the dawn was waking in the east and the lurid glow from the forest illuminated the whole scene. The smoke was very thick and suffocating now, and he beat it back with both hands as he stumbled down the stairs. What if it were too late to save her — Pamela, his beloved wife?

There was a loud roar above his head, followed by a tremendous crash. He fell forward and knew no more.

When he came to his senses, he was lying on the ground, and Pamela was bending over him.

"You're safe, Pamela?" he said.

He began to be conscious of a terrible pain that seemed to devour his whole body. He was stretched upon a rack of torture.

"You mustn't touch me," he whispered.

Above his head the African sky looked like a pool of deep blue. But the lofty tower of Djebl Anaba no longer stood proudly against it in its snow-white splendor. The place was burnt out, and only the stained and smoke-blackened walls stood there, ruined and stricken.

But Ralph did not see them. He was only aware that Pamela's face was bending over him, that Pamela's lips were close to his own.

"Ralph . . . dear Ralph . . ." she said. There were tears in her eyes. Why was she crying? She was safe . . . only the house had been burnt. . . . What did that matter as long as she were safe?

"Oh, Ralph, why did you go back into the house?"

There was the tenderest reproach in her voice.

"I saw you go in," he said, "it wasn't safe. I tried to find you. But you didn't answer when I called. And I couldn't get any farther — the flames were everywhere."

"Oh, Ralph, I didn't go into the house. I only went round to the courtyard. And I had left you safely in the garden."

"I thought I saw you go into the burning house . . ." he repeated, smiling.

Then his face twitched with agony.

"Pamela, what does it mean? This pain?"

The sharpness of death hung on his gray face like a shadow. . . .

"It means — you have been horribly hurt — by the fire, Ralph," she said. "You were hurt in trying to save me."

"Am I dying, Pamela?" His great dark eyes sought hers wistfully.

She did not answer. He could hear the faint sound of her sobbing.

From the heaped-up stones of the ruined house a thin film of smoke was rising. It showed faintly gray against the sky, dimming something of its ardent and pure blue.

"You must go back home," he said faintly; "you

must try to foregt . . . Djebl Anaba. . . . My dear, my dear."

Some one — it was not Pamela — forced a little brandy between his lips. Across the bewildering confusion of his own thoughts he could hear Father Benedict's voice uttering Latin prayers. He was giving him the last absolution. He was to go on his last journey fortified and strengthened by the rites of Holy Church.

It could not last long then, this pain which was so terrible, so unbearable.

His eyes were a little dim now, and the great blue pool of the sky seemed very remote and far away. But he could still see Pamela's figure kneeling there, close to him. His face — almost the only part of him that had not suffered from the flames and the falling walls — was turned toward her. It was not very long before he ceased quite sudenly to breathe. . . . The soul that so recently had made its peace with God had passed beyond the fret of earth's happenings.

The sunshine quivered and danced upon the ruined walls of Djebl Anaba. The little thin column of gray smoke still ascended into the hot air. Somewhere far off in the plain the faint music of an Arab flute sounded with monotonous melancholy. But the long strip of forest between the subterranean lake and Djebl Anaba lay in smoldering heaps of smoking timber. No birds were singing there to-day, and the golden African sunlight seemed to mock at that scene of infinite desolation.

But Pamela, for whom his very life had been given in an ardent and ungrudging sacrifice that had been at once complete and final, saw across the confused bewilderment of her own grief and loss the significance of that last hour; the triumph and

success that were the fruit of its very failure, the lighting of that lamp so long unlit, even the ultimate scattering of those hosts of darkness.

She felt a hand laid on her shoulder. Looking up, she saw Billy standing beside her. His face was still blackened with the smoke, and the tears coursing down his cheeks had made little white channels across the grime.

"Pam," he said gently.

She rose stiffly to her feet. Surely she had been kneeling there for many hours.

"I want you to come to St. Augustin," he said.

"Not before ——" She could not say the words. Her mouth trembled.

"You can come back here to-morow. And afterward ——"

"Yes, afterward?"

What afterward could there be for her without Ralph, who had given his life for hers?

"I shall take you home again, Pam dear — if you will let me," said Billy Mowbray.

THE END

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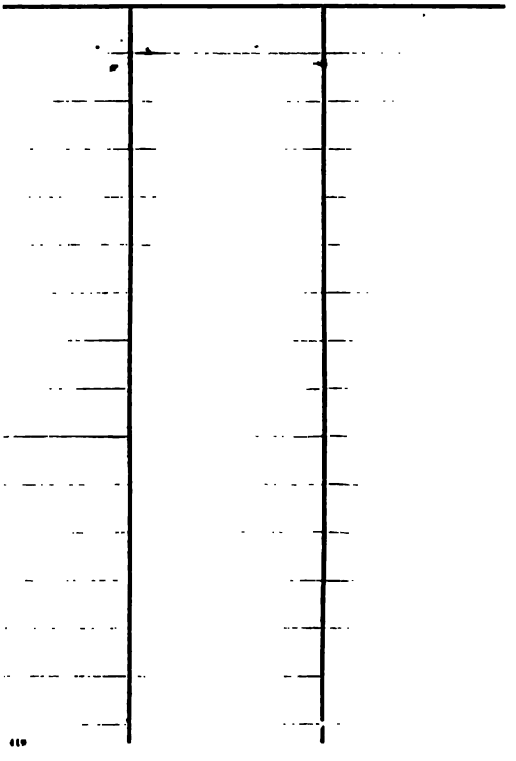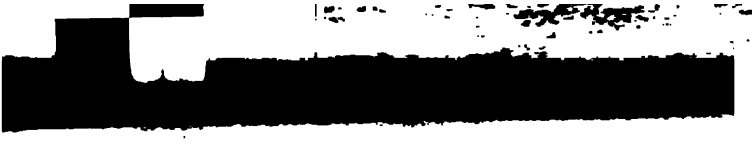
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